

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON #35

“BE YE RECONCILED TO GOD”

2 CORINTHIANS

BY Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: I am going to do something a little different with this lesson and suggest a couple of ways to look at 2 Corinthians that are different from the outline given in the manual. I will not make a habit of this, because I think the manual is fantastic. If you are teaching Gospel Doctrine, that is where you need to go for your direction. But this book has been intriguing for me for some time because it offers special insights into service and happiness. But first some background.

As was mentioned in an earlier lesson, the church at Corinth has been polluted by apostates who hate Paul's integrity, doctrine, and authority. Because he announced a change in itinerary regarding his visit to the Corinthians, enemies now say his work and word cannot be trusted. Chapters 1-7 seem to be his explanation for the change in his plans. These same infidels have claimed that Paul is not really an apostle, and that he has pocketed the money collected in Corinth for the poor in Jerusalem. In chapters 8-9, Paul reminds the believers of his conduct among them and asks them to take that as evidence of his trustworthiness. In chapters 10-13, Paul promises that he will come to the saints in Corinth, he testifies of his apostolic calling, and he expresses his readiness to exercise discipline upon those who challenge the truth and pervert the gospel of Christ.

I. PAUL DESCRIBES VARIOUS WAYS TO SERVE OTHERS

One day while reading this book, I began to note the different ways in which it is possible to serve others. I was delighted to discover 9 of them. When I taught this lesson, I used the computer to design a street with 9 houses on it. I put a pair of home teachers at the bottom of the street, and a pair of visiting teachers at the top. I put class members in pairs and told them they were the visiting or home teachers, and since they lived in a small branch in El Salvador, where few were active they had the assignment to care for the nine families whose homes were on the paper. Under each home I wrote one or more references for a kind of service that someone might need or that might be rendered. The assignment was to read the verses and

determine what kind of service each family needed. The verses and a brief explanation for each kind of service follow.

1. “Blessed [be] God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” (1:4)

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; [we are] perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” (4:8-10)

We must be willing and anxious to give comfort in time of trouble.

2. “Ye also helping together by prayer . . .”

We must pray for others in their times of trouble. It will always be true that “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16).

3. “But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye [ought] rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.” (2:5-11)

Forgive others and teach others to forgive.

4. “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. . . . For the love of Christ constraineth us . . .” (5:9-14)

Persuade others to believe in Christ.

5. “Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all [things] approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” (6:3-10)

“That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also. For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye [yourselves] are wise. For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face. I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more

abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, [in] perils of waters, [in] perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” (11:17-27)

Give no offence to others. Be willing to receive hurt rather than give hurt. Be willing to suffer for the truth and your love of it and of others.

6. “ Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” (7:9,10)

Help others to repent for the right reason.

7. “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (9:6-8)

Share what you have cheerfully, as much as you can, even if you are poor.

8. “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. For I

suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.” (11:3-6)

Preach and share the pure and simple gospel of Christ with those around you.

9 “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection. Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction. Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” (13:5-12)

Examine yourselves and insure that you live in unity and peace with those around you.

After class members had identified from the verses the kind of service each family needed, I read or told 9 stories, one for each kind of service, and invited class members to apply them to the correct homes. Then, on the back of the paper, I asked them to write the names of three or four people they knew, together with the kind of service they needed, and to make a personal commitment to serve each of them in one of the ways these verses teach.

II. PAUL’S WRITINGS SUGGEST 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY HAPPY PEOPLE

Here is another interesting way to look at some of the passages in 2 Corinthians. The title is a take-off on the Stephen Covey book, but I think he

will not mind.

This can be taught in several ways. The simplest is to list the verses and the habits in parallel columns on a handout or on the board. Let class members match the verses with the correct habits by individual or small-group study. A more teacher-centered approach would be to read each verse or passage with the class and then discuss and identify together the *happy habit* suggested therein. Wordstrips could be attached to the board or wall as each habit is identified.

I have provided the correct numbers for the verses following each habit. I know you do not need them, but it may simplify your study and preparation.

VERSES

1. 1:3-4
2. 2:7,8
3. 4:8,9
4. 4:17,18 (7:4)
5. 4:16
6. 5:15
7. 6:1,3-4

HABITS

- A. NEVER OFFEND ANOTHER PERSON, NO MATTER WHAT THEY DO OR HOW MUCH THEY DESERVE IT. (#7)

- B. DON'T ALLOW TRIALS TO DISCOURAGE YOU. HANG IN THERE. IF YOU ARE FAITHFUL, YOU WILL GROW STRONGER EACH DAY. (#5)

- C. ALWAYS BE READY AND ANXIOUS TO SHARE YOUR TESTIMONY AND LOVE TO BLESS AND COMFORT OTHERS. (#1)

- D. NO MATTER HOW HARD LIFE SEEMS TO BE, BE OF GOOD CHEER. HAVE A GOOD ATTITUDE. (#3)

- E. ALWAYS REMEMBER CHRIST AND LIVE YOUR LIFE IN HIS SERVICE. SATAN WAS PLEASED BY CAIN'S ACTIONS (MOSES 5:21) MAKE SURE YOUR ACTIONS PLEASE THE SAVIOR. (#6)

F. NEVER SOUR YOUR LIFE BY HOLDING A GRUDGE. FORGIVE AND LOVE EVERYONE. (#2)

G. BE GRATEFUL AND HAPPY WHEN YOU HAVE TRIALS, KNOWING THEY WILL TEACH YOU VALUABLE LESSONS AND WILL WORK FOR YOUR GOOD. (#4)

CONCLUSION

The scriptures, by themselves, have little value. No one will receive multitudes of heavenly blessings—God will not open to us the windows of heaven nor cause them to shake for our good—just because we have copies of the standard works on the bookshelves of our homes. *We must do something with them!* Even faithful, daily reading is not the goal. Somehow we must come to understand them. A diagram might look like this:

SCRIPTURES >>>> UNDERSTANDING

Our time with the scriptures must help us come to understand them, their meaning and content and context. But even that is not enough. We must not only move from reading and studying to understanding, but we must move beyond understanding to the only place where scripture study can truly sanctify and exalt us. The final diagram must look like this:

SCRIPTURES >>>>> UNDERSTANDING >>>>> APPLICATION

We must be asking ourselves as we read and ponder, “What is the Lord asking me to do in these passages.” Then the scriptures will truly begin to live in us.

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