

A&P Home Church | Weekly Study

2 Corinthians 1-2



BOOK SUMMARY:

Second Corinthians returns to similar themes as those Paul mentioned in his first letter to this church. Paul is glad to hear that the church in Corinth has heeded his advice. At the same time, it is necessary for Paul to counter criticisms about his personality and legitimacy. Most of this text involves that subject. The fifth chapter, in contrast, contains comforting words which Christians have quoted often in times of hardship. Paul also details his expectations that the church in Corinth will make good on their promise to contribute to the needs of suffering believers in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY:

Second Corinthians 1 follows about a year after the end of 1 Corinthians, and much has happened between the two letters. Paul has had a painful visit with the Corinthians before traveling to Macedonia, where he wrote a painful letter. The text of which has not been kept. He writes this new letter from Macedonia, as well, after learning about a positive change of heart on their behalf. Paul begins by praising God for His comfort for those who are afflicted and defending himself against several complaints from some in the church.

CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY:

Second Corinthians continues uninterrupted from the previous chapter. Paul is explaining why he waited to come to Corinth. He wanted to see if they would side with him, or with the man who challenged his authority. They disciplined the man. He repented. Paul commands restoration and forgiveness. He then tells of failing to find Titus in Troas with news about them before transitioning into teaching that Christians are the aroma of Christ on earth, smelling of death to the perishing and life to those being saved. This brings Paul back to the subject of his own authority in chapter 3.

Throughout the week continue to look through the scriptures, think through the questions, and apply the Word to your life. Email any questions during the week to Brandon & Travis at aphomechurch@gmail.com & ap.travisjohnson@gmail.com.

MONDAY

Author: 2 Corinthians 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of 2 Corinthians as the apostle Paul, possibly along with Timothy.

Date of Writing: The Book of 2 Corinthians was very likely written approximately A.D. 55-57.

Purpose of Writing: The church in Corinth began in AD 52 when Paul visited there on his second missionary journey. He stayed one and a half years, accomplishing much for the sake of the gospel. A record of this visit and the establishment of the church is found in Acts 18:1-18.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul expresses his relief and joy that the Corinthians had received his “severe” letter (now lost) in a positive manner. That letter addressed issues that were tearing the church apart, primarily the arrival of self-styled (false) apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13) who were assaulting Paul’s character, sowing discord among the believers, and teaching false doctrine. They appear to have questioned his veracity (2 Corinthians 1:15-17), his speaking ability (2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:6), and his unwillingness to accept support from the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:7-9; 12:13). There were also some people in Corinth who had not repented of their licentious behavior, another reason he had sent the “severe” letter (2 Corinthians 12:20-21).

Paul was overjoyed to learn from Titus that the majority of Corinthians had repented of their rebellion against Paul (2 Corinthians 2:12-13; 7:5-9). The apostle encourages them for this in an expression of his genuine love (2 Corinthians 7:3-16). Paul also urged the Corinthians to finish collecting an offering for the poor (chapters 8-9) and to take a harder stance against false teachers (chapters 10-13). Finally, Paul vindicated his apostleship, as some in the church had likely questioned his authority (2 Corinthians 13:3).

Key Verses:

2 Corinthians 3:5: “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”

2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 10:5: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

2 Corinthians 13:4: "For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you."

Brief Summary: After greeting the believers in the church at Corinth and explaining why he had not visited them as originally planned (vv. 1:3–2:2), Paul explains the nature of his ministry. Triumph through Christ and sincerity in the sight of God were the hallmarks of his ministry to the churches (2:14–17). He compares the glorious ministry of the righteousness of Christ to the “ministry of condemnation” which is the Law (v. 3:9) and declares his faith in the validity of his ministry in spite of intense persecution (4:8–18). Chapter 5 outlines the basis of the Christian faith—the new nature (v. 17) and the exchange of our sin for the righteousness of Christ (v. 21).

Chapters 6 and 7 find Paul defending himself and his ministry, assuring the Corinthians yet again of his sincere love for them and exhorting them to repentance and holy living. In chapters 8 and 9, Paul exhorts the believers at Corinth to follow the examples of the brothers in Macedonia and extend generosity to the saints in need. He teaches them the principles and rewards of gracious giving.

Paul ends his letter by reiterating his authority among them (chapter 10) and concern for their faithfulness to him in the face of fierce opposition from false apostles. He calls himself a “fool” for having to reluctantly boast of his qualifications and his suffering for Christ (chapter 11). He ends his epistle by describing the vision of heaven he was allowed to experience and the “thorn in the flesh” he was given by God to ensure his humility (chapter 12). The last chapter contains his exhortation to the Corinthians to examine themselves to see whether what they profess is reality, and ends with a benediction of love and peace.

Connections: Throughout his epistles, Paul frequently refers to the Mosaic law, comparing it with the surpassing greatness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace. In 2 Corinthians 3:4–11, Paul contrasts the Old Testament law with the new covenant of grace, referring to the law as that which “kills” while the Spirit gives life. The law is the “ministry of death, written and engraved on stone” (v. 7; Exodus 24:12) because it brings only the knowledge of sin and its condemnation. The glory of the law is that it reflects the glory of God, but the ministry of the Spirit is much more glorious than the ministry of the law, because it reflects His mercy, grace and love in providing Christ as the fulfillment of the law.

Practical Application: 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. That being said, there are a few things we can take from this letter and apply to our lives today. One thing is stewardship, not only of money, but of time as well. The Macedonians not only gave generously, but "they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will" (2 Corinthians 8:5). In the same way, we should dedicate not only all we have to the Lord, but all that we are. He really doesn't need our money. He is omnipotent! He wants the heart, one that longs to serve and please and love. Stewardship and giving to God is more than just money. Yes, God does want us to tithe part of our income, and He promises to bless us when we give to Him. There is more though. God wants 100%. He wants us to give Him our all. Everything we are. We should spend our lives living to serve our Father. 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.

TUESDAY

Second Corinthians is Paul's second biblical letter to the church he helped to establish in the Greek city of Corinth. Much has happened between him and the Corinthians since he wrote 1 Corinthians from the city of Ephesus about a year earlier. He has traveled to Corinth, had a painful and likely confrontational visit there, and has written another letter—now lost—in response to that visit. This letter comes after receiving news from his co-worker Titus about a change of heart among the Corinthians regarding Paul.

Paul often begins his letters by expressing his thanks to God for his readers and God's work in their lives. This time, though, he begins by praising God for His comfort to those who experience affliction. Those comforted by God can respond by giving comfort to each other. Paul connects Christian suffering to Christ's suffering and connects comfort from God in that suffering to the comfort Christ received, as well.

The Corinthians seem to have been aware of Paul's most recent experience of suffering for Christ's sake. Some apparently questioned why an apostle of Jesus should suffer so much. Shouldn't he be protected by his connection to God's power? Paul's response is that his suffering as an apostle made it possible for the Corinthians to receive the gospel. And the comfort he has received from God in his suffering has allowed him to comfort them when they experience suffering as he has (2 Corinthians 1:1–7).

Perhaps the Corinthians did not understand how severe Paul's recent suffering was. He describes himself and his companions as being burdened beyond their own strength, feeling sure they would die, and being forced to rely on the God who raises the dead. God did deliver them, and Paul stood assured that God would continue to deliver them. Paul invites the Corinthians to be part of God's victory by continuing to pray for Paul and his co-workers and to give thanks to God for their deliverance from harm (2 Corinthians 2:8–11).

Question: "How should a Christian respond to persecution?"

Answer: There is no doubt that persecution is a stark reality of living the Christian life. Christian persecution is to be expected: the apostle Paul warned that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus said that, if they persecuted Him, they will also persecute

His followers (John 15:20). Jesus made it clear that **those of the world** will **hate** Christians because the world hates Christ. If Christians were like the world—**vain, earthly, sensual, and given to pleasure, wealth, and ambition**—the world would not oppose us. **But** Christians do not belong to the world, which is why the world engages in Christian persecution (see John 15:18–19). Christians are influenced by different principles from

those of the world. We are motivated by the love of God and holiness, while the world is driven by the love of sin. It is our very separation from the world that arouses the world's animosity (1 Peter 4:3-4).

Christians must learn to **recognize the value of persecution** and even to rejoice in it, not in an ostentatious way but quietly and humbly because persecution has great spiritual value. First, the persecution of Christians allows them to share in a unique fellowship with the Lord. Paul outlined a number of things he had surrendered for the cause of Christ. Such losses, however, he viewed as "rubbish" (Philippians 3:8) or "dung" (KJV) that he might share in the "fellowship of [Christ's] sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). The noble apostle even counted his chains as a grace (favor) that God had bestowed upon him (Philippians 1:7).

Second, in all truth, Christian persecution is good for believers. James argues that trials test the Christian's faith, develop endurance in his life, and help develop maturity (James 1:2-4). As steel is tempered in the forge, trials and persecution serve to strengthen the character of believers. A Christian yielding graciously to persecution demonstrates that he is of superior

quality as compared to his adversaries (see Hebrews 11:38). It's easy to be hateful, but Christlikeness produces kindness and blessing in the face of evil opposition. Peter says of Jesus, "When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).

Third, Christian persecution enables believers to better value the support of true friends. Conflict can bring faithful children of God together in an encouraging and supportive way they might not have known otherwise. Hardship can stimulate the Lord's people toward a greater resolve to love and comfort one another and lift one another to the throne of grace in prayer. There's nothing like an unpleasant incident to help us reach a greater level of brotherly love.

Even in the face of Christian persecution, we can press on. We can thank God for His grace and patience with us. We can express gratitude for those whom we love in the Lord and who stand with us in times of distress. And we can pray for those who would accuse, misuse, or abuse us (2 Corinthians 11:24; Romans 10:1).

Question: "Is suffering for Christ always going to be a part of being a follower of Christ?"

Answer: The Bible talks a lot about suffering for the sake of Christ. In the era in which the New Testament was written,

followers of Jesus were often ostracized by their own families and communities. Some of the worst persecution came from the religious leaders (Acts 4:1-3). Jesus told His followers, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

(Matthew 5:10). He reminded His disciples, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18).

Second Timothy 3:12 says, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." As in biblical times, many Christians today have found that making a public declaration of faith in Christ can result in imprisonment, beatings, torture, or death (Hebrews 11:32–38; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 3:8; Acts 5:40). Often those of us in free nations shudder at the thought, but we feel relatively safe. We understand that there are thousands who suffer daily for the sake of Christ and are thankful we don't have to. **But is there only one kind of persecution?**

Jesus stated clearly what it means to follow Him: **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?"** (Luke 9:23–25). Our modern understanding of the phrase "take up their cross and follow me" is often inadequate. In Jesus' day the cross always symbolized death. When a man carried a cross, he had already been condemned to die on it. Jesus said that, in order to follow Him, one must be willing to die. We will not all die martyrs' deaths. We will not all be imprisoned, beaten, or tortured for our faith. So what kind of death did Jesus mean?

Paul explains in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer

live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." **To follow Christ means we die to our own way of doing things.** *We consider our will, our rights, our passions, and our goals to be crucified on the cross with Him.* Our right to direct our own lives is dead to us (Philippians 3:7–8). Death involves suffering. The flesh does not want to die. Dying to self is painful and goes against our natural inclination to seek our own pleasure. But we cannot follow both Christ and the flesh (Luke 16:13; Matthew 6:24; Romans 8:8). Jesus said, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Paul suffered more than most for Jesus' sake. He said this to the Christians at Philippi: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him" (Philippians 1:29). The word *granted* here means "shown favor, given freely as a gift." Paul does not present suffering as a curse, but as a benefit.

Suffering can take many forms. By choosing to obey the Lord Jesus Christ, we are setting ourselves at odds with the world. Galatians 1:10 says, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (NASB). By closely adhering to the teachings of the Bible, we set ourselves up for rejection, mockery, loneliness, or betrayal. Often, the cruelest persecution comes from those who consider themselves spiritual but have defined God according to their own ideas.

If we choose to take a stand for righteousness and biblical truth, we ensure that we will be misunderstood, mocked, or worse. We need to keep in mind that no threat of suffering deterred the apostles from preaching Christ. In fact, Paul said that losing everything was worth it "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10, NASB). Acts 5:40-41 describes the reaction of the apostles after they received another beating for preaching about Jesus: "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."

Suffering in some form is always going to be a part of being a true follower of Christ. Jesus said the path that leads to life is difficult (Matthew 7:14). Our hardship is also a way of identifying with His suffering in a small way.

Jesus said if we deny him before men, He will deny us before His Father in heaven (Matthew 10:33; Luke 12:9). **There are many subtle ways to deny Christ.** If our actions, words, lifestyle, or entertainment choices do not reflect His will, **we are denying Christ.** If we claim to know Him but live as though we didn't, **we are denying Christ** (1 John 3:6-10). Many people choose those forms of denying Christ because they do not want to suffer for Him.

Often our greatest suffering comes from within as we battle for control over a heart that must die to its own will and surrender to Christ's lordship (Romans 7:15-25). In whatever form suffering comes, we should embrace it as a badge of honor and a privilege that we, like the apostles, have "been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."

How did 1 John help in paving the way for understanding in 2 Corinthians?

How are you being persecuted for Christ's sake?

What ways (even subtle) are you denying Christ in your life?

WEDNESDAY

Paul next defends himself from apparent accusations that he lacks integrity, transparency, and honesty. Some have frivolously charged him with selfishly changing his travel plans. Paul insists that, especially with the Corinthians, he and his team have acted with simple integrity, openness and sincerity, hiding nothing from them either in person or in his letters. He has been upright and straightforward in all circumstances (2 Corinthians 2:12-14).

He made his travel plans to visit Corinth with full intention to follow through, but he changed those plans at the leading of God's Spirit and for the good of the Corinthians themselves. Paul describes himself and his team and the Corinthians as having been established in Christ by God, who also poured out His own Spirit on them as a seal, guaranteeing their place with God in eternity. Just as Christ is the yes to all of God's promises, He has been the yes to the changes in Paul's travel arrangements (2 Corinthians 2:15-22).

More specifically, Paul says that he delayed returning to Corinth most recently to spare them, likely meaning from the discipline he would have had to bring against them for their potential sinfulness. He and his co-workers did not want to lord their authority over the Corinthians. Instead, they preferred to be able to work with them for their joy and continued faithfulness (2 Corinthians 2:23-24).

Question: "How can I know when God is telling me to do something?"

Answer: Pray, especially when you're unsure of God's will for your life. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:7). If you don't know what to pray, you can always personalize and pray verses such as, "Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul" (Psalm 143:8) and, "Guide me in Your truth and teach me" (Psalm 25:5).

The primary way God commands us is through His Word. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

If Scripture commands something of us, there's no need to hesitate and wonder if it's really God's will for us. He cares so much about us that He already gave a plain and clear guidebook to life – the Bible. "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). "The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7). "How can a young man keep

his way pure? By living according to Your Word” (Psalm 119:9).

Likewise, God never contradicts Himself, so He’ll never ask you to do something contradictory to Scripture. He will never ask you to sin. He will never ask you to do something Jesus Christ wouldn’t do. **We need to immerse ourselves in the Bible, so we will know which actions meet God’s standards.** “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth: meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything that is written in it” (Joshua 1:8).

Christians also have the Holy Spirit to discern what is, or is not, God’s will for our lives. “The Spirit of truth . . . will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). Sometimes the Holy Spirit will either agitate our conscience if we’re making a wrong decision, or He will pacify and encourage us when we’re leaning toward the right decision. Even if He doesn’t intervene in such noticeable ways, we can have confidence that He’s always in charge. Sometimes God will alter a situation without us even realizing He has acted. “The Lord will guide you always” (Isaiah 58:11).

If God is calling you to take a leap of faith, be encouraged by His presence. “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

And remember, “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

What we are not to do is expect to hear voices from God. There is a dangerous trend today where people seek to hear a “word from the Lord,” extraneous to what He has already given us in the Bible. “The Lord told me . . .” has become the mantra of experience-driven Christianity.

Unfortunately, what He “tells” one person often contradicts what He “tells” another, and these extra-biblical revelations have proven to be very divisive, tearing apart church after church as one person’s experience seeks to take precedence over another’s. This results in chaos, benefiting no one except Satan, who loves to sow discord among believers. We should make the apostle Peter our example in these matters.

In spite of the miraculous experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, where he beheld the glorified Christ speaking with Moses and Elijah, Peter refused to rely on that experience, declaring instead that “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:18-19, NKJV).

THURSDAY

In chapter two, Paul explains the reason he delayed his return to Corinth from Macedonia. His first visit had ended painfully. An influential man in Corinth had apparently challenged Paul, perhaps about his authority over the church as a true apostle of Jesus. Paul left. He knew that if he returned as scheduled, it would create another painful visit.

Paul did not know if the rest of the church would side with the man who had sinfully rejected his authority or would side with him and correct the man with some form of discipline. So Paul stayed away until he could find out. He did not want to cause the Corinthians pain or for them to cause him pain, at least not until it was necessary. Instead, he wrote a painful letter to them in great sadness and distress, describing what they must do to make things right (2 Corinthians 2:1–4).

It becomes clear that the Corinthians did, in fact, side with Paul and against the man. The man's sin in rejecting God's authority through Paul was significant. They punished him, and he repented in sorrow. Some interpreters suggest the term used here might be better rendered as saying the church "scolded" or "reprimanded" the man. Paul urges them now to end the punishment, to forgive and comfort the man, and to reaffirm their love for him. Paul insists that forgiveness must happen in each direction in order to keep them from being tricked by Satan (2 Corinthians 2:5–11).

Paul briefly resumes the story of why he was delayed in returning to them. He sent the agonized letter to them with his co-worker Titus. They planned to meet up in Troas, so Titus could describe to Paul whether the Corinthians were with him or against him. Paul found an open door to the gospel in Troas, but he did not find Titus. Since his spirit was not at rest, he returned to Macedonia (2 Corinthians 2:12–13).

Question: "What does the Bible say about forgiveness? What does it mean to forgive?"

Answer: The Bible never gives a "dictionary" definition of forgiveness, but it shows us many examples of it. The greatest of all examples is the forgiveness of God. Although the following passage

does not use the word *forgive*, it describes the concept of God's forgiveness perfectly:

Psalm 103:8–12: The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are

above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

It is important to note that forgiveness operates in the realm of sin. In the majority of the passages in the Bible that contain the word *forgive* or *forgiveness*, sin is mentioned. The following are typical examples:

Genesis 50:17: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly. Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.

Exodus 32:32: But now, please forgive their sin.

Leviticus 4:35: In this way the priest will make atonement for them for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven.

1 Samuel 25:28: Please forgive your servant's presumption.

Matthew 12:31: And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Luke 5:20: When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

For a person to find true forgiveness, he or she must **admit the sin**. This is called confession. If a person tries to pass off sin as a mere mistake, human failing, or

temporary lapse of judgment; or if he or she simply denies the sin altogether, it is a barrier to forgiveness.

1 John 1:8–10: If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

God forgives sin, yet this does not mean that He simply "looks the other way" or "sweeps it under the rug." The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23), and that penalty must be paid. In the Old Testament, God allowed for a sacrificial animal to take the place of the sinner. Leviticus 5:15–16 says, "When anyone is unfaithful to the Lord by sinning unintentionally in regard to any of the Lord's holy things, they are to bring to the Lord as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. It is a guilt offering. They must make restitution for what they have failed to do in regard to the holy things, pay an additional penalty of a fifth of its value and give it all to the priest. The priest will make atonement for them with the ram as a guilt offering, and they will be forgiven."

The writer of Hebrews observes, "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). However, the blood of sacrificial animals did not actually pay for

sin. It simply postponed the judgment until a better sacrifice could be offered to pay the full penalty of sin and make forgiveness possible. Hebrews 10 explains this in depth, but the following excerpts from that chapter outline the flow of the argument:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1–4)

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. (Hebrews 10:11–12)

“This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. (Hebrews 10:16–18)

In order for God to forgive us, Jesus gave Himself as **the** sacrifice for sin. Jesus

alluded to that sacrifice at the Last Supper when He told His disciples, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). After the resurrection, the apostles carried the message of forgiveness through Jesus Christ throughout the world, preaching to both Jews and Gentiles:

Acts 10:43: All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Acts 13:38: Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Ephesians 1:7: In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.

So God forgives people on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ. **The only requirement is that sinful people confess their sin, turn from it, and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior.** Once a person has experienced the forgiveness of God, he or she is then able (and responsible) to forgive others. “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13). In fact, those who refuse to forgive betray the fact that they do not understand how much of their own sin they need to have forgiven. Christians should be willing to forgive people who have sinned against them. Every person has wronged God far

more than they have been wronged by other people. Jesus illustrates the point in Matthew 18:21-35:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they

were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

We often hear the phrase *forgive and forget*, and this can be misleading. As a rejoinder to this phrase, sometimes we hear, "I'll forgive, but I will never forget." To forgive and forget does not mean that a person who has been wronged develops some kind of sanctified amnesia. A person who has been abused will never forget that it happened. A person who has suffered from an adulterous spouse will always remember that experience. A parent who has had a child abducted will probably think about that crime every day he or she spends on earth. Yet, it is possible for each of these people who have been sinned against to forgive and also to forget, as long as the biblical definition of *forget* is in view.

In the Bible, remembering and forgetting do not have to do with retention of information in the brain. In Genesis 8:1, after the flood, "God remembered Noah." Does this imply that for a while God had forgotten about Noah, misplaced him

among the flood waters, and then one day He remembered and thought He had better check on him? No, the biblical concept of remembering has to do with “choosing to act,” and *forgetting* means “refusing to act” on the basis of something. When the Bible says God “remembered” Noah, it means that God chose to act on Noah’s behalf and sent a wind to help the waters recede more rapidly. God promises that, under the New Covenant, “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:34; cf. Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). God does not forget that people have sinned, but, when He forgives, He chooses not to act on the basis of those sins. It is similar to the sentiment expressed in 1 Corinthians 13:5 where “love keeps no record of wrongs.” In the phrase *forgive and forget*, the two terms are really synonyms. Both mean that the person who has forgiven will not continue to hold that sin against the wrongdoer or take it into account in future interactions. A person may remember that it happened, but he or she can choose not to act on it—that is biblical forgetting.

Many wonder about forgiving people who have sinned but have not confessed, repented, or asked for forgiveness. Sometimes in court, the victims of a crime will get to speak to the perpetrator before sentence is passed. Often the victims will tell how the crime has impacted them and ask the judge to impose the strictest sentence. But, on occasion, the victim will say to the perpetrator, “I forgive you.” Is this

forgiveness valid if the convicted criminal has not confessed and asked for forgiveness?

The answer is both “yes” and “no.” On one hand, the victim often forgives the criminal so that he or she will not be eaten up by hatred for the criminal. The forgiveness granted by the victim in court does not absolve the criminal from any legal penalties, so the state is still right to prosecute. On the other hand, God forgives people when they confess their sin and ask for forgiveness; forgiveness only comes through faith in Christ, which involves a spiritual transformation. In the courtroom example, even if the victim “forgives” the criminal, there can never be the establishment or restoration of a relationship unless the criminal confesses his sin and actually seeks forgiveness.

The goal of biblical forgiveness is not only to benefit the victim but to restore the sinner. This cannot happen without the acknowledgment of sin on the sinner’s part. Therefore, in some cases the one who has been sinned against is right not to “let it go” until the sinner has asked for forgiveness. Good parents should be willing to forgive once their wayward child has confessed and asked for forgiveness, but they are right to withhold forgiveness until their child has taken the steps necessary to allow the reconciliation. It would be foolish for a father to simply forgive his teenage son for disobeying his rules (and the law) by drinking and driving if the son does not acknowledge that what he did was wrong. However, the father should be willing to

forgive when the conditions are right. In some situations, granting unrequested forgiveness cheapens the concept and ignores the seriousness of the offense.

A person should always be willing to forgive every time forgiveness is requested, as Jesus taught. It goes without saying that on some of those occasions the request may be insincere, or, even if sincere, the person will commit the same offense against us again at a later time. After all, isn't this what we do to God, and isn't that how He forgives us?

In some cases the one who has been sinned against is right to simply "let it go," even if forgiveness has not been requested, and in other cases the one sinned against needs to wait until the offending party has confessed and asked for forgiveness, so that the relationship can be restored. This is the principle behind church discipline, as outlined in Matthew 18:15–17. If the confrontation of the sinner brings about confession, then reconciliation and forgiveness are offered. If the confrontation is unsuccessful, excommunication from the church is the final result. As a general rule regarding petty slights and offenses in the family and in the church, a person should let them go—"turn the other cheek," as Jesus put it (Matthew 5:39). However, if the

offense is such that turning the cheek is not possible, the offended party is obligated to go talk to the offender about it. Under no circumstance does one have the right to harbor resentment, nurture bitterness, or gossip about the offense.

Here are some questions to ponder in relation to forgiveness:

- Have I confessed my sin and received God's forgiveness?
- Is there anyone whom I have sinned against and from whom I need to ask forgiveness?
- Is there anyone who has sinned against me and has asked me for forgiveness, but I have refused forgive?
- Is there anyone I am holding a grudge against for past wrongs?
- If there is an unresolved issue, will I simply "let it go," or will I go talk to the offender about it? (Continuing to hold a grudge is not a biblical option!)
- Would I be willing to forgive if the offender asked me for forgiveness?

FRIDAY

Paul suddenly breaks off the story to describe how Christians are like captives of a Roman general carrying incense in a victory parade through Rome. Christians, metaphorically, are "the aroma of Christ." Those watching a Roman victory parade would interpret the incense differently, depending on whether they saw it as victory or defeat. In the same way, the "aroma" of Christ's influence smells of death to those headed for eternal death in unbelief, and smells of life to those being saved by forgiveness of sin through faith in Christ.

Paul insists that only those who are truly Christians are sufficient to carry the aroma of Christ. He insists he and his co-workers are not false apostles, but sincere and truthful men sent by God to deliver His message (2 Corinthians 2:14–17).

Question: "What does it mean that Christians are the aroma of Christ?"

Answer: Second Corinthians 2:15 says, "For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." To understand what the apostle Paul meant when he said that Christians are the "aroma of Christ," we must look at the verses immediately surrounding the expression: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?" (verses 14–16).

For Jewish people, the apostle Paul's analogy of "the pleasing aroma of Christ" would present an immediate association.

In the Old Testament, the scent of burnt offerings was described as "an aroma pleasing to the Lord" (Genesis 8:20–21; Leviticus 23:18; Numbers 28:27). For the Gentiles, this phrase would suggest the scent of incense being burned as an offering to the gods. However, Paul had a more specific picture in mind.

The apostle was speaking to the Corinthians about recent events in his ministry of evangelism. Despite all the difficulties and disappointments he'd faced while traveling from city to city spreading the gospel, Paul was able to reflect on God's goodness with thanksgiving. The apostle then compared this ministry of evangelism to the triumphal military parades that were common at that time in the Roman world.

Paul's metaphor would be readily understood by his audience, with the apostle and his co-laborers portrayed as victorious soldiers in a triumphal procession. During these Roman military parades, captives of war would be marched through the streets as garlands

of flowers were carried and incense was burned to the gods. The aromatic perfumes wafted on the air as spectators and those in the procession breathed in their fragrance. At the parade's finale, many prisoners would be put to death. Thus, the aromas were pleasing and life-giving to the victors, but they were the smell of death to those who had been defeated.

In Paul's analogy, he separates humanity into two groups: those on the path of salvation and those on the road to destruction. The aroma spread everywhere by the ministry of evangelism was the knowledge of God as victor. Christians who spread the gospel are members of God's victorious army led by Jesus Christ. Believers are like the aroma or fragrance spread during the victory processions. Both the victors and those perishing smell the aroma; however, it has a different meaning for the two groups. For the victorious army and its peoples, the aroma would relate to the joy of triumph. But for the prisoners of war, the fragrance would be associated with defeat, slavery, and death.

This brilliant metaphor contrasts Christian and non-Christian responses to hearing the gospel. To non-Christians, those on the road to destruction, believers who preach the gospel spread the smell of death, as it were. To Christians, those on the path to salvation, they produce the fragrance of life.

Overwhelmed by the extreme importance of this ministry of spreading the gospel, Paul exclaimed, "And who is equal to such a task?" The implication is that no one is worthy. Paul was astounded that God would appoint humans to share in this task. Later, in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6, Paul affirms that our ability rests solely on God: "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Question: "What does it mean to gain the whole world but lose your soul?"

Answer: In Matthew 16, Jesus asks what good it is for a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul (Matthew 16:26). To gain the whole world is to receive all

the world has to offer—money, fame, pleasure, power, prestige, etc. To lose one's soul is to die without a right relationship with Christ and spend an eternity in the lake of fire.

In the context of His rhetorical question, the Lord was predicting His suffering and death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21).

When Peter resisted His teaching, Jesus rebuked him and said, “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (verse 23). Jesus then spoke to the crowd and reminded them that there was nothing worth more than one’s own eternal soul. Rejecting Christ might mean temporary, earthly gains, but it comes at the worst possible price.

The Jewish people had been waiting for a Promised One for many centuries. Most expected that this Messiah would be a military leader or a king like David or Solomon. Jesus’ disciples recognized that He was the One whom the prophets had predicted. However, Jesus did not speak about conquering with an army or by taking over the government. Instead, Jesus taught that the Messiah would suffer and die at the hands of men.

Just before He asks, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” Jesus says that, in order to truly follow Christ, people must be willing to “deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). To take up one’s cross is a reference to being condemned to die. Jesus’ statement is symbolic of a total, final commitment.

In other words, one needs to be willing to give up everything in order to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Worldly suffering shouldn’t be a deterrent. This is the context of Jesus’ question, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” If a person rejects Jesus and becomes the richest, most powerful person on earth, he has still made a poor decision. Sooner or later, earthly things will fade away. And that person will have lost the only part of himself that lasts forever. The day of reckoning is coming: “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done” (Matthew 16:27).

There is nothing more valuable than a person’s soul. To trade that away is the epitome of foolishness. **When a person chooses to embrace this world instead of heaven, he is forfeiting his soul.** If a person rejects Christ for the sake of *anything* in this life, he will lose his soul. Esau despised his birthright, choosing stew instead; Judas sold the Savior for a few pieces of silver; Demas loved this present world and forsook the ministry. All three men thought they were gaining something but actually lost everything.

Do you smell of death to this world, or are you living a comfortable worldly life?

What focus would you say you have in your day to day life?

What have you learned this week?

What are some questions you still have after this week's study? Join us on YouTube Live Saturday at 12 EST to ask- or always feel free to email them any time!
aphomechurch@gmail.com



Thank you to BibleRef.com & GotQuestions.org for the study resources!