

2 Corinthians Class 3 Transcript

Welcome back to FI Online. We're getting ready to begin class number three in our series on 2 Corinthians, "The Ministry of Reconciliation."

Once again, for class number two, we had no questions turned in. So, we won't spend any time trying to answer questions right now. But as always, we do want God's blessing on our studies. So, we will ask that you join us in praying and we will ask God's blessing on class number three.

[Prayer]

[01:34]

The apostle Paul is dealing with a very touchy situation in the church in Corinth and some correction has been given and some have responded very well. Others have not. So, Paul is reconciling, in a sense, himself with the congregation and of course talking about God's reconciliation as well.

We finished up through chapter 1. So, let's pick up today in chapter 2, right at the beginning. Now remember at the end of chapter 1, Paul was explaining why he had not come to them before now. There were those apparently who were accusing Paul of saying that he was going to come but you never really know what Paul's going to do. So, he's explaining there's a reason I didn't come to you when I had originally intended.

So, we pick it up here in chapter 2 in verse 1, he says: 2 Corinthians 2:1 ***But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow.*** Now, the commentators are all divided over how to interpret this particular section. Of course, we realize that the chapter and verse divisions are artificial. They're not something that God put in there. They're helpful, they're useful, they help us to find things. But there is really no break between chapter 1 and chapter 2.

But what is Paul saying? I don't want to come again to you in sorrow. It's obvious that when Paul was in Corinth to raise up the church the first time, that was a visit. And it certainly wasn't sorrowful; it was a joyful time.

He talks about coming ***again*** in sorrow. So, there is great debate over whether Paul actually visited the Corinthian church again because of some of the difficulties that were there and we have no particular record of it, which is perfectly possible.

Or, if he's referring to a letter that he sent which was a very strong letter and made people sorrowful. We will see that as we go further in 2 Corinthians that he tells us that as a matter of fact that did happen. So, is this talking about a visit? Is it talking about another letter? We don't really know exactly.

But one principle we can derive from this: Paul knew that some kind of corrective action had to be taken. And some were not going to be happy about it. But it had to be done, and he was prepared to do whatever was necessary.

The only hope for reducing the sorrow that might be involved in bringing this correction is if those who needed to repent, would respond before he got there. So, he's giving them time, and sometimes that's a very important thing to do.

[04:19]

Now Paul goes on to say: **2 Corinthians 2:2** *For if I make you sorrowful, (maybe put it a little differently, the Greek is intensive) **If I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?***

In other words, Paul says, you're the focus of my life. My service to you is what gives my life the value and importance that it has. I am wrapped up in that. This is the commission God gave me, that Jesus Christ sent me to you to help you, to strengthen you. And if in the process, I make you sad then I'm sad too. I share in that; I feel that.

It gives an insight into the heart of one of God's true servants. Sometimes people get the idea that if someone gives correction that they kind of almost enjoy doing it. That's not true. I think any of you who are parents would understand that principle that when it comes time to correct your children, it's something you know you have to do. It's part of your responsibility as a parent.

And it's not something that you feel like – Oh, that's terrible, I don't want to do that – but it isn't something that makes you happy. Causing your child unhappiness, causing them to cry for a period of time. That's not something that you look forward to. And in a sense, that's what Paul is saying to them: I don't look forward to this. I don't want to have to do this. So please straighten out the problem before I come and have to be corrective.

[05:50]

So, he says in **verse 3: *And I wrote this very thing to you***, I wrote that before. Now again, think about that. I wrote this to you. When was it he wrote it? It's not in 1 Corinthians. So, was there another letter? Well, again, that's certainly possible. But some of the commentaries say that this phrase, "***I wrote this very thing to you***" is what's called an epistolary aorist—a very fancy term that basically means that I'm writing it now but I know you're going to be reading it later. So, I'm writing it as if I'm there while you're reading it. I wrote it. I'm writing it now but by the time you get it, it's past tense, I wrote this. So, it's possible to be taken either way.

2 Corinthians 2:3 *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.* He says, I don't want to get distracted. The thing

that gives me joy, the thing that we look forward to, the goal that brings us the joy and happiness in life, that brings us the contentment in what we do is the goal of God's Kingdom.

That's what I look forward to, that's what you look forward to. And so, he says; I'm confident that that's what's important to us. So, let's not get bogged down in the problems of today even if they're painful, even if they're difficult to deal with. Let's keep the perspective.

So, I don't want us to, he says, I don't want to have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy. We all have this same joy and direction and so I'm really not looking forward it. So please, address the issues properly.

[07:35]

Verse 4: For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you,

Now again, when you read 1 Corinthians, you don't get a feeling of affliction and anguish of heart. Yes, there is some correction in 1 Corinthians. And we have to recognize that and realize that it's there. But you don't read 1 Corinthians and think, oh, this is written by somebody who is just agonizing over this. I don't see that in the book.

There's a great deal of joy, there's a great deal of instruction. Yes, there's a good bit of correction too. But I don't see this anguish of heart and much affliction, with many tears. That doesn't seem to be there. So, to me that indicates that there's a good possibility that there's another letter that Paul wrote to the people in Corinth in which he had to be very direct and very strong about some of the issues.

And so, he says, it was that was my attitude of heart, that was what was in me. Now if somebody comes along and says, I wrote this just kind of angrily, and I was upset and angry, and I was just putting people in their place. Well, what do I say?

You weren't here when I wrote it. I'm telling you that the words I wrote, I wrote with tears in my eyes because I didn't want to write those things. I didn't want to have to be corrective. And again, I think that shows something about a servant, a true servant of Jesus Christ. There is no joy in correction, but there is the sense of responsibility. I can't overlook it, I can't just pretend it's not there.

[09:06]

2 Corinthians 2:4 (So) For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, (I wasn't trying to grieve you) but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

I don't want you to, I'm not trying to play on your emotions and make you unhappy, make you sad, make you feel guilty. But I was just sharing the genuineness of my concern for you.

I think again, it's probably reasonable to think that there were those who were accusing Paul of abusing his authority, of being as the old phrase was that we used to hear, "a sheriff instead of a shepherd."

And Paul is saying, no, that's not what was in my heart at all. I was there, I was loving you, I cared enough for you that I had to step up and do that. And again, as a parent, you understand that out of your love for your children, you must correct them when they need correction. You try to do it as gently as possible, but you know that there are times when it must be done. And you love them so much that you know it's what you have to do. And that's what Paul is saying here.

[10:12]

Now Paul goes on to say, (**Verse 5**): ***But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me***, (don't worry about me in this) ***but all of you to some extent--not to be too severe***. That may sound a little funny, so let's look at another translation.

I like this one: The New English Translation puts it this way: ***But if anyone has caused sadness, he's not saddened me alone, but to some extent, not to exaggerate, he's saddened all of you as well***.

So, the problems that existed there produced a sadness in the whole church. They grieved the church as a whole. Now he's again saying: I don't want to overemphasize this, I don't want the people who have made mistakes and have repented to have this sense of guilt that they have to go through life with. And he's going to talk about forgiveness as we go a little further here.

But he's making the point that when people do things that are wrong, they affect the whole church. They affect everyone. And when someone has to be corrected, nobody is happy about that. It's one of those things that can make us sad.

Now, we have traditionally explained this section of 2 Corinthians 2 as a reference to the man who Paul corrected very strongly in 1 Corinthians 5, because of the sexual sin that was involved. And the whole congregation, remember, had been kind of complicit in the sense that they hadn't addressed it at all, and that was causing a number of problems.

There were people who felt like, oh well, let's just wait and be gentle and we'll give him time to work this out. And others who were saying, this is sin! This is not something that's supposed to be in the congregation. Why doesn't somebody step up and deal with this? And so, there's beginning to be a division over this individual's sin.

[12:04]

And Paul again had to address that and he's very strong in chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians saying, as if I were right there with you, I'm telling you put this man out because you cannot have that sin continuing in the church. **[1 Cor 5:3,13. 3: 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. 13: But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."]**

Now there were probably some people who reacted by saying, oh Paul is just being too harsh. There were others who were probably saying, well, it's about time somebody did something. And in a sense almost a pleasure in the fact that this man was put away—and that's wrong. We shouldn't tolerate sin but neither do we take pleasure in the fact that somebody had to be corrected in a very strong way. It grieves us; it saddens us. And in a sense, that seems to be what Paul is saying.

Now there is a second explanation that's sometimes given and I can't say that it's right or wrong either way. But the second explanation is that there were individuals who, because of the way Paul dealt with that situation, were very upset with Paul and had probably said things about him that were really inappropriate.

Again, saying he was abusing his authority, he was being too harsh; all of those things. And, it's put forward that perhaps what Paul is saying here is, well, you know, I wish they wouldn't make that kind of a judgment about me because they're wrong. But I'm not going to hold it against them.

We all sometimes make bad judgments. So, we answer a matter before we hear it as we talked about last time. And so, I'm not offended by them. I don't bear a grudge against them. But he goes on to say, that in many ways, when sin is involved, everybody is affected. Everyone has been affected in a saddened way. So, he said, I'm not trying to be too severe about it but I do understand that something like this affects the whole congregation. We can't just ignore it.

[13:56]

He goes on to say—and this is one of the reasons why we feel this probably refers to the man who had to be put away, **Verse 6: This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man,**

Okay, he was put away from the church. He was disfellowshipped for a period of time or suspended, whichever the case may be. But he was put away.

And as a result of that, people did not carry on the normal relationship with him. He was separated from fellowship in the church. That's an important concept. It's necessary sometimes to help make the point of how serious sin can be.

So, this individual was put away. And as it says, the majority followed that. The majority agreed with what Paul said and they did not continue to fellowship with him. And, evidently what we see here is that the man repented; that what he experienced drove home to him that this was a serious matter and he changed. He repented. And Paul is going to show that he is forgiven and that everybody needs to likewise forgive him.

[15:04]

We also though ought to note that phrase there: that ***the punishment inflicted by the majority***. Now the term *punishment* that's used here is a term that means a penalty placed upon someone as a result of judgment. It is, it carries with it the implication of causing people to go through this because they deserve it. It is not a punishment of lashing out, it is, as we explained back in 1 Corinthians, a punishment which is intended to produce a change, to bring a person back, to rectify, to reconcile in that sense an individual who's going in a wrong direction.

He tells us here that this was done by the majority. Well, it would be nice to think that the majority means everyone, but we don't really know that. It does indicate, in a sense, because he doesn't use the punishment inflicted by all that there were perhaps some who didn't respond to Paul's correction. Who decided that they knew better than Paul on how to deal with this situation and they didn't quit fellowshipping with the individual.

So, Paul recognizes that. And I think he's kind of included that here: that okay, the right result has come about in this man's life because of what the majority have done, because you followed the instruction you were given and this man has repented and he's now being restored. But I still know, Paul is saying, that not everyone went along; not everyone followed the instruction that was given.

[16:42]

So that, verse 7: he says, on the contrary, (rather than punishment) you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. So, Paul tells us that it is our responsibility in a situation like this to forgive.

Now, remember there were probably people in the congregation when Paul said, this man needs to be put away who felt a certain sense of satisfaction. I'm really glad that that problem has been addressed.

Okay, Paul is saying, he's repented. What are you going to do now? Are you going to accept him back? Are you going to be generous in your forgiveness of him? Because he needs to know, not only that he can come back to services and fellowship, but that he is genuinely forgiven by those who may have felt a certain pain at what he had done, who may have been offended at his sin. They need to know that he is forgiven.

[17:40]

The word that's used here is an interesting word. I don't know that I'll try to pronounce, let's see: *charisstai*, *charisstai*. It is based upon, again remember, *charis* is the word that's translated grace which means a gift given from the goodness of the giver without regard to the worthiness of the recipient.

Now you'll note here, as we look at this [PowerPoint slide], that some of the definitions of this word:

- *to give or grant graciously and generously with the implication of good will on the part of the giver*

Just as God's grace shows us God's good will and generosity toward us, forgiving someone should not be something we do grudgingly. It should be something that we do generously and gladly.

Note the second point:

- *to forgive on the basis of one's gracious attitude toward an individual*

This is how God forgives us. And it is the model of forgiveness for us. We don't just say, well, okay, I guess it's okay now. No, we are eager to forgive, we are generous in that.

The third point:

- *to release a person from the obligation of repaying what is owed*

In other words, forgiveness does not say, oh well, don't worry about it and it doesn't really matter. No, forgiveness recognizes that something was wrong. But we still release the person from any sense of, well, I'm still holding you responsible.

No, we are generous in saying, in giving our forgiveness to an individual like that. That's very important. So, note that forgiveness includes with it this concept of a free and generous approach.

[19:21]

But notice as well, it isn't just forgive. There's something else more. He says to comfort, *parakalesai*. And again, this comes from *parakletos*, remember we talked about that where it's translated in John as the comforter, the Holy Spirit. *Para* meaning the side, *kaleo* meaning to call to someone's side.

So, the word has that sense of one being called to the side of another to encourage, to strengthen, to come, as it says here, to one's side, to encourage and help.

[19:58]

Notice this: forgiveness and comfort are not passive. They require action on our part, when someone has repented of a sin. Now, in this case, we're dealing with someone who was put away from the church. But we all stumble in sin along the way and we may cause harm to someone else. We may hurt them in some way because sin doesn't only hurt the sinner, it often hurts other people as well.

And when that individual repents, we have a responsibility to generously forgive but also to encourage. Not just to stand back and say, well, I guess old so-and-so is back in church. Okay. I hope he gets it right this time.

There's an encouragement that we're supposed to have for one another. We're to reach out to one another. So, what Paul says here is, when someone has repented, there is this duty to forgive and to comfort.

And he says, if not, what takes place? The individual can be swallowed up with too much grief, to be overcome, to grieve to the point of giving up. You ever felt so guilty about something that you just feel like: oh, what's the sense in going on? Well, we don't want to be that way. God doesn't want us to be that way. And we certainly don't want one of our brothers or sisters to feel that way. So, we need to encourage and help them.

So, Paul is talking about that and his own example is included here, as well.

[21:25]

So, he says, verse 8: **Therefore** (okay, as a result of forgiving and trying to encourage) **I urge you to reaffirm your love to him**. It literally means to reach out to someone, and it means do so in a sense powerfully or forcefully. It means to make something valid, to ratify it, again, to cause someone to recognize the reality of something; to show something to be real.

So, in other words, you reach out to this person and you assure them of your love, your forgiveness, your concern for them; the fact that fellowship is restored.

Now think about this for a moment. One of the things that we sometimes talk about that Paul often includes early on in his epistle is a wish for peace. The Greek word is *eirene*. And it means again, certainly means peace. It's the sense of shalom. It's all that goes into making for peaceful relationships between people.

But it has an interesting root. It was a word that was used to describe a bone that was broken, put back together and healed. Now when you study that, the biological process of what takes place and the healing process of a broken bone. Where that break has taken place, where the bone has put back together and heals actually becomes stronger than what it was before. So, in a sense, what it's telling us is when a breach has taken place, and you get it back together, the relationship is actually strengthened.

I would bet some of you have seen that in your own lives where perhaps someone did something to you that hurt you. And yet they repented, they asked your forgiveness, they changed and your relationship with them is now better than it was before.

Maybe it's the other way around. Maybe you're the one who caused the harm and caused someone else the pain and the suffering. And then you've realized it and you've gone to them; you've asked their forgiveness and you've changed. And again, in many cases, that relationship you have is even stronger. I think that's a part of what Paul is showing here. That we need to reaffirm our love to one another so that the relationship is even stronger than it was before.

[23:53]

He wrote then in **verse 9: For to this end I also wrote**, (again, there's that past tense, I wrote) **that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.**

Another translation which I like a little bit better because **put you to the test** sounds like someone in a superior position [saying], I'm going to check you out and see if you're what you should be. And that's not really the sense. He says, I wanted to know your character, I wanted to know that as you went through this, you learned and your character is strengthened, as well.

You see it's not just a test for the individual who had the sin. It's a test for everybody else too. Are you willing to submit? Are you willing to do what you should do? Are you willing to love someone so much that you're willing to participate in the correction as well? And you're willing to welcome them back? I needed to know this; I needed to check you in this, **whether you're obedient in all.**

There's a time when discipline is necessary. And some people are too reluctant to act on that. Others may be too quick or too harsh. Likewise, there is a time to set aside discipline and genuinely restore someone. Again, some people may be too quick to do it while others are too slow.

The Corinthians had shown that they were willing to follow Paul's instructions on both of these things. They had acted when Paul said to act, and they had welcomed him back when the time had come. He says, I needed to know **whether you were obedient in all things.** The sense here of obedience is someone has heard, they've listened, they've considered, and they've responded.

It's not just rote obedience. It's not just a soldier saluting and going off and doing what he's ordered to do. It is someone who's looked at it, has heard, has understood and responded. He said, I needed to know that.

[25:51]

Now, he says, **verse 10: Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive.** (I'm not holding a grudge against this situation.) **For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ,**

He's saying basically if, if there was anything that I needed to forgive someone for. He may be saying that the sin which needed God's forgiveness wasn't against Paul. It wasn't against me, he says.

So, while Paul does forgive him, it's really God's forgiveness that matters. If God's forgiven him, well, how could I not forgive him? How could I hold back in this way? On the other hand, it could be a reference, as some have suggested, to some personal offense that was given against Paul in this process. Somebody saying things they shouldn't say.

Well, probably again, all of us have had something like that happen. Maybe we were the one that said it, maybe somebody said something about us. And Paul is just saying, look, I'm not really worried about that. We all make mistakes, we all say things that we shouldn't. As James later on says, the man who doesn't sin with his tongue is a perfect man (James 3:2). So, all of us have done that. And Paul is saying, I've already forgiven him. Don't worry about it, it's gone.

And he says, I've done this for your sakes. Forgiveness of the offender was an important part for the rest of the congregation as well as it was for Paul and the offender himself. Forgiveness from God must produce forgiveness among God's children. We can't leave that out.

He says he does this **in the presence of Christ**. It's as if Paul is saying, it's as if Jesus Christ is watching this situation and watching what we'll do. And he says this forgiveness is given in front of Him and He can see this as well.

[27:42]

Notice what Christ said back in the sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6, verses 14 and 15.

He said, **Matthew 6: 14-15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15: But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

So, Paul is building on Jesus Christ's direct teaching saying, okay, the man has repented now, what are we going to do? Are we going to be forgiving as we should?

Paul also in another place, Ephesians 4 verse 32 said: **Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, (even) just as God in Christ**

forgave you. When we see the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and we recognize that that sacrifice was given for our sins, so that forgiveness is possible, how can we be reluctant to forgive someone else? One more passage: ***Colossians 3:13***, Paul wrote: ***bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.***

And again, we could spend the rest of our class talking about the example of Jesus Christ and His forgiveness toward us. A forgiveness that is given long before we could do anything to deserve it. He gave that sacrifice 2,000 years ago for my sins today. How do you quantify that? How do you wrap your mind around the greatness of that sacrifice?

And He says, okay, when you're dealing with one another, you're in the church, you're dealing with one another, there is a special relationship. Now you know it's easy to bear with one another if you try to be independent and on your own. There's really not much to bear with. You're not around someone else. So, it's pretty easy to bear with somebody you're not around.

But when we're with one another, when we're in a relationship with one another, close to one another; that's when things can get difficult. But he tells us, bear with one another. We're all human beings and we all understand that we need to bear with each other. Even in a marriage, we all know that there are certain things that our mate has to bear with in us. And we bear with certain things too. But we love our mates. So, that's not some terrible thing.

[30:11]

Your children don't always do what you would like them to do. Sometimes there are personality traits in your children that you really wish were a little bit different. But they're not. They're your children, you love them, you bear with them. You try to help along the way. You forgive, as it says here. But they're your children and you love them.

Likewise, in the church, they're our brethren, we love them. So, sometimes, do we have to bear with perhaps an annoying personality trait? Yeah, sure do. Sometimes people have to bear with our annoying personality traits too. If someone in the church kind of maybe they're just not as friendly as you think they ought to be. Okay, bear with that. Help them, encourage them. It's not some terrible thing about them.

We used to almost laugh about that: when we graduated from Ambassador College, there was Mister or Miss Ambassador. And you were supposed to have this wonderful outgoing personality and you could do all kinds of things. And we found out that's not the way we are.

[31:11]

I have sometimes told the students that I labored for many years under this almost a sense of guilt because I'm not Mr. Extrovert. I'm not the person who goes out and just says, "Hi, how are you, good to see you today!" I'm a quieter person. I'm on the introversion side of the scale. Now that doesn't excuse being unfriendly. I'm not saying that. But, I'm a quieter person. That's the way I am. And some people are that way; that's not a terrible thing, that's not a sin. God made us in different ways, and we have different strengths and, as we say, growth areas.

We all do. We bear with one another.

Now, what Paul was dealing with here was a problem within the church that people weren't really ready to bear with one another. They weren't as forgiving as they should be. So, it's good to refer to these things and remind ourselves what God expects.

But Paul tells us there's another dimension. There's another dimension we need to be concerned about. This isn't just a matter of: well, you know, it would sure be nice if you would be friendly and helpful and encouraging. This is another dimension here.

[32:20]

verse 11: **2 Corinthians 2:11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.** He tells us this: that Satan will take advantage of the person who's discouraged, who's down. Who has struggled with something and perhaps repented of it and changed but still feels that sense of guilt. I did a terrible thing.

Again, the apostle Paul himself was a great example of that.

Paul persecuted the church. He hauled people off to prison and some of the things he says indicates that there may have been Christians who were martyred because of Paul. He repented of that terribly to the depth of his being, but it still stuck with him. There were times when Paul looked at his past life and said this is what I did, and it was terrible.

When people get really down, when they get really discouraged, Satan has an opening. And Paul says, be careful. That Satan will take advantage of any opening like that and if you're not there to help that person, to strengthen them, you may be leaving them vulnerable to Satan. And that's not something that we ever want to do.

We're not ignorant of the fact that Satan has devices, plots, schemes—ways in which he tries to destroy what God is doing in His people. We need to be careful that we're not a tool, that we don't allow him an opening in someone else, in ourselves certainly. But we have a duty to one another, as well—to encourage and to strengthen, to help protect.

Here's what *Expositor's* says about Christian discipline. It says:

“Christian discipline certainly includes punishment administered in love, but it is not simply retributive or punitive. It is also remedial or reformatory. It aims at reinstatement after repentance through forgiveness and reconciliation.”

This is the approach that we must take.

[34:29]

So, we go on here, verse 12: Paul says: ***Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 13: 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.***

Okay, let's look at these two verses together. What's taking place? Paul told us that he was going to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost and then after that he would leave. Indications are from what we see, that he went from Ephesus northward along the coastal area of Asia Minor to the city of Troas.

Troas was a major city. It was, at times, it looked like it might even be bigger than Constantinople or Istanbul as it is today or Byzantium as it was called later as well. It was such a prosperous city, very important. And he went there, and he said God opened a door for me to preach the gospel here, which I really wanted to do.

That was something that normally Paul would have been eager to step up and do. But he said, I was so concerned because, he said, I had sent Titus on to Corinth to see how people were doing and to make sure that the problems were being addressed. And he said, Titus wasn't there. He hadn't come back yet.

And, as much as I wanted to do the job in Troas, I had to know how you were doing and I knew Titus would be coming overland. He would be coming back through Macedonia. So, he said, I couldn't rest there, and I took leave of them and I went to Macedonia.

[36:13]

Now he goes on to say, verse 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.***

Now, this is kind of an unusual section here and we probably need to recognize it as kind of an inset, a kind of a digression. In fact, in the commentaries, it is known as the great digression or the great parenthesis. Because Paul brings in something that seems quite different from the story flow of what he's talking about.

He's been talking about: I left Ephesus, I went to Troas, I waited for Titus, he wasn't there; I went to Macedonia. He's emphasizing to the people of Corinth, I wanted to be with you, I wanted to come see you. But, ahhh, I needed to know, I was on my journey

but I was giving time for these things to work out. For Titus' visit to produce good fruit, but I was very anxious concerning you. He wanted them to know that.

But he says now: I have to keep a certain perspective here too. As I look back on the situation now and he's by this point, he's talked to Titus and he knows that most of the people there have responded very well. So, he's relieved. He said, you know I remind myself that Jesus Christ leads in triumph.

Now **triumph** had a different meaning to it in a sense that we might use it today. It actually was a noun that was used to describe something that took place in the Roman Empire. Something we don't even have today. It was a particular ceremony, in a sense, a public celebration, that was given to a great leader, a military leader, after he had come back in victory in a great battle.

And there were all kinds of things that were involved in this process.

But it, we understand it just a little bit, at least it will help us get a picture of what he's talking about here and what he means by this diffusing ***"the fragrance of His knowledge in every place."***

The **triumph** was, in fact, as we said, a formal celebration. The term here, it says, the verb means to lead as a captive in a triumphal procession. The word describes an ancient custom for a victorious general returning home. The term is also used in Colossians 2, the only other place it's used in the Scripture. And we're shown there Jesus triumphs over the forces of evil and leads them subjugated in His victory march (**Colossians 2:15**).

The picture is pretty much the same thing here. Paul sees himself as marching in Jesus Christ's triumph, in His triumphal procession so to speak.

[39:20]

I wanted to read a section here and this is again from William Barclay. I won't read the whole thing because it's rather long, but I want to get at least a certain sense of it. And you get, even in this graphic that we're showing, we're going to get a certain sense of this.

So, let me quickly cover this:

In his mind is the picture of a Roman Triumph and of Christ as a universal conqueror. The highest honor which could be given to a victorious Roman General was a triumph. To attain it, he must satisfy certain conditions. He must have been the actual commander-in-chief in the field. The campaign must have been completely finished, the region pacified and the victorious troops brought home. Five thousand of the enemy, at least, must have fallen in one engagement. A positive expansion of territory must have been gained and not

merely a disaster retrieved or an attacked repelled. And the victory must have been won over a foreign foe. In a triumph, the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the capital in the following order: first came the Roman Official, the State Officials and the Senate, then came the trumpeters. Then were carried the spoils from the conquered land. For instance, when Titus conquered Jerusalem, the seven-branch candlestick, the golden table of showbread and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome.

[40:56]

Now here is a relief that exists in Rome today that shows that very procession, that triumph, that was given to Titus after the conquering of Jerusalem. You see there very clearly the seven-branch candlestick that had stood in the Temple itself. So, it gives us an illustration of that.

It goes on to say:

Then came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships. There followed the white bull for the sacrifice which would be made. Then there walked the captive princes, leaders and generals in chains, shortly to be flung into prison and in all probability almost immediately to be executed. Then came the lictors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres, then the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. And then came the general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses.

And then it goes on to describe this and all the people lined up and shouted great praise and so on to him.

But you'll notice there were the priests with the incense. And it was a particular kind of incense. But as one of the commentators brings out, for those who were prisoners, the smell of that incense reminded them, they were marching to their own execution. So, though it may have been a sweet smell, that's what it was. To the people around them, to the general, to his troops, that same incense was the smell of victory and of glory. But to the prisoners, it meant something else.

Keep that in mind as we go further through this.

[42:43]

Now, Paul talks about how this fragrance diffuses the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the knowledge of His plan, the knowledge of what He's doing. Again, fragrance is a very powerful key to memory. A smell can trigger memories that were not even thought about out loud. In some cases, we might even have difficulty putting into words.

Fragrance, good or bad, may be the very first stimulus that attracts our attention. Perhaps Paul is saying that the Christian life is more than simply a list of actions. It also changes the person in ways that are more sensed than objectively observed. A person who has the mind of Jesus Christ is a person who's pleasant to be around. In many cases even for people who don't know anything about God's way. They can be pleasant to be around. A family that is guided by the ways of God is pleasant to see, pleasant to be involved with.

[43:46]

So, he goes on in verse 15, and he says: 2 Corinthians 2:15 (***For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.*** Oh, what our lives show by the way that we live is like that incense. A fragrance that goes about and for those who are being saved, it is a wonderful fragrance. It reminds us of God's promises. For those who are perishing, it is a fragrance that reminds them of the death of those who rebel against God.

He says in verse 16: ***To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.*** (And he says) (***And***) ***who is sufficient for these things?***

Or another translation here, let's get that sense of it: who is sufficient? He's basically saying when you try to wrap your mind around these things, who is able to fully comprehend this? Who is able to fully explain this in a way that everyone can understand? The Christian life permeates everything about the Christian and it changes that individual.

Paul goes on to say, verse 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.*** Paul is saying, look, I don't come to you as somebody who's trying to sell you something. Remember the principle that Jesus Christ gave: ***"freely you've received, freely give."*** (Matthew 10:8)

All of us know that in the history of the Church of God, and I use that term very broadly. In the history of the Church of God, our pattern has been, we don't sell the truth. The truth is free. You can have it free of charge. If you want to help others have it and you wish to contribute to do that, wonderful. That's a proper thing and as believers that's certainly the thing that we can do.

But we never sell the truth of God. How could you put a price on it? How do you put a price on the knowledge of eternal life? How do you put a price on the knowledge of God's Spirit or the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf? There's no way to charge for that! It's given free of charge.

And Paul says, I didn't come to you as somebody trying to get something from you. Now, there's probably a couple of things we're beginning to see here, and we'll see

more as we go a little further. There were individuals who expected to be paid to do their teaching, to share the truth of God. I'm coming to as your teacher; you need to pay me.

Now is it proper to pay a teacher? Yes, it is. But there are those who come with that, I'm doing this so that I can be paid by you. It's my occupation, my job. Rather than it being something that I do out of joy and I'm grateful to receive support for it.

[46:58]

There's another aspect of this as well and I like this particular slide as well. A paraphrase of this verse. Paul says:

In spite of my inadequacies in your sight, I taught the truth and I didn't ask you to pay for anything I shared with you. My motives were open and clear. The message we've brought is from God and we speak that message in the full knowledge that Jesus Christ Himself is watching and holding us accountable.

It's just a paraphrase, we try to capture the sense of what's there. He said, that's what I recognize, and this is the way. You know, am I inadequate? Sure, I am. Nobody's sufficient for doing this. Nobody does this perfectly. But I tried to do the best I can, and I haven't asked you for anything.

One of the things we're going to see as we go a little further is there are individuals who've come to Corinth after Paul was there and are trying to undermine Paul. And apparently, they're insisting that the Corinthians' tithes and offerings are used to pay them. Paul said I never did that. I never did that when I was with you and yet, these people are doing it. They're insisting, we're the servants of God, we deserve to be paid.

Well, servants of God do deserve to be paid. But Paul didn't approach it that way at all. So, we're probably seeing a little something forming here where Paul is making a little bit clearer that his approach is a little bit different.

[48:29]

Let's move on to Chapter 3, verse 1. He says: ***2 Corinthians 3:1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?***

Paul is saying, do you think I'm trying to come and impress you in some way? You know, I'm not coming and giving my qualifications or showing you that you should listen to me because look at all the education that I have.

The term *commend*, another translation puts it "recommend." And I think that may be the sense of it. Do we begin again to recommend ourselves? You know, we're coming back, and saying, Oh, well, okay, here's why you should listen to us. Do we need, and

apparently, there's a little a little barb here, apparently some others feel that they need epistles of commendation to you or letters of recommendation from you. He said, we didn't ask for that.

I didn't come to you and say, okay now, I've been working with you, I'm going to a new area, I'd really like you to give me some letters of recommendation so that I can take them along. Maybe we would put it today, I'd like a good Yelp review. I'd like you to be able to say, oh yeah, Paul's really a great guy, listen to him.

He said, I didn't ask for that from you. And when I came here, I didn't bring you letters of recommendation from Philippi or Thessalonica or Berea, those other areas; I didn't come with letters of recommendations from them. Do I need that? Do I need to have somebody else recommend me? Or is my life and the message that I brought you an adequate recommendation?

Today we would probably talk about somebody having certain degrees. Now, it would be very easy in most cases for some, let's say, to look down upon the ministers of Jesus Christ today. You're not going to find many of the ministers in the Church of God and again, I can use that term very broadly. You're not going to find many ministers there with theology degrees.

We didn't go to an institution to get a theology degree. We did study the Bible and that is where our backing comes from. But there would certainly be those who would say, how can these people know anything? I mean after all; they've never studied these things out; they've never looked into this.

Now most of the people who have at times studied theology—and we have a few who have had the opportunity to do that—would often tell you that theology is not about the Bible. It's about man's ideas about God. And it's not really biblical very much at all. And so, we're not focused upon that. We don't try to provide that.

[51:22]

When students come into Foundation Institute, we point them to the Bible. We try to help them understand the Bible. But we don't go through all kinds of theology. We don't study Immanuel Kant, they don't study Nietzsche. They don't study some of these philosophers and theologians. We help them understand the Bible.

Paul says, do I need some kind of degree? Do I need a Th.D.? A Ph.D.? Do I need to be Dr. Paul in order for you to listen to what I said? To the truth that I bring?

There may also be included in this—well, let me back up. Let's say in the ancient world, letters of commendation or recommendation could be very important. [In] one sense, Paul, when he sent Titus or Timothy to Corinth, he says that he sent them with certain recommendation. He did so for Chloe, the deaconess. He recommended her. We'll find even in the General Epistles where John does the same thing. But, understand, that

that was kind of a different approach. It's more of a letter of introduction to someone they didn't know.

Paul is saying, did I really need to bring this to you? Do I need that?

[52:37]

It may also be in this the idea of those who had come to Corinth who were teaching for profit. And, that they brought letters of recommendation. But they were really proving themselves to be religious peddlers instead of those who were really doing the work of God.

Paul is not, in any way, deprecating the value of an education, nor do we today. It's very important. But he is asserting that the official recognition of some human or some human institution doesn't supersede God. God backs and works with individuals and that matters a lot more than some other physical thing.

Down through the ages, there's been very few of the true servants of God who had theology degrees from recognized institutions; just not there. God gave them the understanding of His Word. We don't understand that Word without God opening our minds. Going to a theological institution doesn't open the mind. Only God can do that. And so, we don't try to go that direction.

[53:45]

He goes on to say verse 2: ***You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;***

If we need proof that what we're doing is from God, you're the proof. God working in your life, changing you, making you a different person is really all the proof we need. Why would we need some kind of letter of recommendation from someone else when your life is the proof of that?

He says, verse 3: ***clearly you are an epistle of Christ***, (as if Christ wrote an epistle, you're that epistle) ***ministered by us*** (served by us) ***written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.***

God has written His way on your heart. He's changed you as a result of that. It isn't just some law written on a table of stone that you can go by and look at. It's not some mezuzah on the door that you can kiss on your way in and out the door. It's written on your heart.

[54:58]

I'm going to tie in one more passage here before we wrap up today. It's in Ezekiel 36, verses 26 and 27 where prophetically God said through Ezekiel: ***Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27: I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.***

The change of heart causes a change of behavior. We do what God says because of a change of heart. Not simply because we've read a book, not simply because we've read tablets of stone, not simply even because we know that God said, do it; because there's a change of heart.

We do what God says because He's taken out that heart of stone and given us a soft heart and He's etched into that heart of flesh His truth, His way, His laws, His standards and we live accordingly.

Well, that's as far as we can go in this particular class. We hope you've enjoyed it. Again, remind you that you have basically one hour after the class is shown if you wish to send in any questions and we'll try to answer those at the beginning of the next class. That we'll begin next time in verse 4 of 2 Corinthians, chapter 3.

Thank you again for joining us.