

Test Passed

2 Corinthians 2

1 and 2 Corinthians Part 19



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Test Passed: 2 Corinthians 2
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 19
Copyright 2024 T. M. and Susie Moore
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, all Scripture are taken from the *New King James Version*. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All quotations: Scott M. Manetsch, *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2017). All quotes from John Calvin are from *Calvin's Commentaries*, Rev. John Pringle, tr. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translational Society). All quotations from Matthew Henry are from *Matthew Henry Concise Commentary*, E-text version Copyright 1996, 2002 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. All Rights Reserved. All quotes from Earl Radmacher are from *The NKJV Study Bible*, copyright ©1997, 2007 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All psalms for singing are from *The Ailbe Psalter* (West Grove: Waxed Tablet Publications, 2023).

Cover art: Yahoo images

Introduction to *2 Corinthians 2*

In a sense, all of 1 Corinthians was a test. Paul challenged the immature and worldly practices the Corinthians had become stuck in and called them to break free of their selfish, schismatic ways and get on the growth path with Jesus. The report from Titus was that they were working on all that Paul had written, beginning with having excommunicated an unrepentant sinner.

So it looks like test passed.

The Christian life is like this, God marks out our daily path with tests. Will we obey His Word? Resist the devil and his incessant temptations? Stand firm in the Word of God? Keep our eyes on Jesus and follow Him to a greater degree of sanctification? We need these tests to grow in our faith and become more like Jesus. Without them, we will simply settle into some comfortable rut of faith where we're never challenged, of little service to others, and hardly growing in the Lord.

If you find these studies, or any of our other resources, helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 103 Reynolds Lane, West Grove, PA 19390.

We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 Sorrow and Joy

Pray Psalm 125.1, 2.

Those who trust in the LORD
Are like Mount Zion,
Which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the LORD surrounds His people
From this time forth and forever.

Sing Psalm 125.1, 2.

(St. Gertrude: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*)
All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!
Like the hills surrounding safe Jerusalem,
Christ surrounds His Church and holds her in His mighty Hand!

Refrain, v. 1

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Read and meditate on 2 Corinthians 2.1-3.

Preparation

1. What had Paul determined?
2. What confidence did he have toward the Corinthians?

Meditation

Paul explained more about why he did not fulfill his plan to come to the Corinthians. He feared that, after such an indicting and admonitory letter as 1 Corinthians, his coming to them at that time would have increased the sorrow he knew they must have felt from his first epistle (vv. 1, 2). And that would only be sorrow for him as well, with no one in Corinth to gladden his soul (v. 2).

Paul intended the Corinthians to sorrow for their sins. He wrote 1 Corinthians because, when he did return to Corinth, he might share with them in the joy of their salvation (v. 3). Schism, blinking at sin, abusing the Lord's Supper, taking one another to court, failing to work for edification—the existence of any of these in a church should bring the people of God to tears of repentance and renewal. That was Paul's intent in 1 Corinthians, and he came to believe that an additional visit as he had planned would not improve the situation but might instead make it worse.

The Corinthians had been a source of great joy to Paul during the nearly two years he served among them (v. 3). His only desire, in causing them sorrow by his first epistle, was to restore them to the joy he knew among them in the Lord. He was confident that they shared this joy, and he hoped that, despite the season of sorrow his epistle had brought about, they would rediscover their joy once again.

Titus' report on the Corinthians' response to Paul's first epistle confirmed—for him, at least—the decision not to have visited them, renewed the joy he'd known among them, and gave him hope that they were back on track with the Lord Jesus.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Although there is much truth found in Nehemiah's words, "Do not worry, for the joy of the LORD is your

strength” (Neh. 8.10), we are still affected by the sorrow or misbehavior of those we love. And conversely, our hearts swell with joy when they are walking in God’s love and truth.

“He who begets a scoffer does so to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy.”

“A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him” (Prov. 17.21, 25).

“My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will rejoice—indeed, I myself; yes, my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak right things” (Prov. 23.15, 16).

“For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 Jn. 3, 4).

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess. 2.19, 20).

We know how other people’s behavior affects our joy; but do we ever stop to consider that our behavior affects others as well?

There are people who pray for you, who love you, and want you to continue to be sanctified in your faith, as you “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2.12). There are those who care deeply for your soul. They may be mentors, or parents, or pastors, or elders, or spouses, but most surely there are those who do care for your soul.

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13.17).

“My joy is the joy of you all” (2 Cor. 2.3). May you experience the joy and be the joy!

For reflection

1. What are some situations that might cause you to sorrow? How should you respond to these?
2. How can you keep focused on the joy of the Lord in the midst of sorrow?
3. Whom will you comfort today by leading them into the joy of the Lord?

Paul says, that he has such a fellow-feeling with the Corinthians, that he cannot feel joyful, unless he sees them happy. Nay more, he declares that they were the source and the authors of his joy — which they could not be, if they were themselves sorrowful. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 2.2

Pray Psalm 125.1, 4, 5.

Pray that the grace and peace of the Lord will prevail in your church, and that your church will be strong in furthering its mission of making all the nations disciples.

Sing Psalm 125.1, 4, 5.

(St. Gertrude: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

LORD, do good and care for those upright in heart.

Those who turn to evil shall from You depart.

Sinful men may increase on their way to hell!

Save Your people, let your peace abound in Israel!

Refrain, v. 1

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!

Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

2 Discipline Full Circle

Pray Psalm 30.1-3.

I will extol You, O LORD, for You have lifted me up,
And have not let my foes rejoice over me.
O LORD my God, I cried out to You,
And You healed me.
O LORD, You brought my soul up from the grave;
You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

Sing Psalm 30.1-3.

(Madrid: *Come, Christians, Join to Sing*)

We will extol Your Name! You have lifted us, O LORD!
Our foes retreat in shame—You have lifted us, O LORD!
You healed us when we cried; safe shall our souls abide;
hell's claim have You denied—
You have lifted us, O LORD!

Read 2 Corinthians 2.1-8; meditate on verses 4-8.

Preparation

1. What was the cause of Paul's grief?
2. What did he instruct the Corinthians to do?

Meditation

We learn here that, when Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5 that the church should excommunicate an unrepentant sinner, he was not angry. He wrote out of “much affliction and anguish of heart” (v. 4), and not to bring the Corinthians to grief, but that they should know the abundance of his love for them and strive together for purity in the Body of Christ.

The source of grief to Paul and the Corinthians was the man they put out of the church, turning him over to Satan for the destruction of his body—that is, of his fleshly ways. The practice of discipline in this case seems to have worked. Evidently the sinful man came to understand the heinousness of his ways and repented of his sin. How did this happen? He had been cut off from friends, excluded from worship, denied access to the Lord's Supper. None of the members of the various house churches in Corinth would have any fellowship with him, thus emphasizing that, for as long as he held on to this sin, he had no part in them.

But he must have come to repentance and patched things up with his father and his father's wife. It was time for the Corinthians to forgive him and restore him to the comfort of their love (v. 6), just as Paul was doing with them in this second letter. And this was not to be some grudging or passive reincorporating of the man into the church. They were to “reaffirm” their love for him (v. 8) as they received him back into the fellowship. This probably implies a public act of restoration. The man had been publicly cast out; now he must be publicly received as one who, having repented of his sin and made the necessary restoration, could be received back into the comfort, fellowship, and edification of the church to keep on in the Lord.

Doing so would be an occasion for rejoicing, and not for sorrowing. Paul's love had led to sorrowing among the churches. Their love led the sinful man to sorrowing. And through these actions God's Spirit worked in their grieving to bring rejoicing and restoration to the Body of Christ.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

“He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue” (Prov. 28.23).

“Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.”

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27.5, 6, 17).

Pharaoh’s magicians had a spiritual side, but they were following the wrong leader. Someone, years previously, should have lovingly taken them aside and told them to follow God and not the Adversary (Ex. 7.10-13). Two of those men were used as an example of “How not to be” by Paul: “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth; men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was” (2 Tim. 3.8, 9).

These were people that needed the *1 Corinthians’ treatment* to cause them to repent and return to follow in God’s path, to experience the *2 Corinthians’ outcome* this man had.

“He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray” (Prov. 10.17).

“Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days” (Prov. 19.20).

“Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease” (Prov. 22.10).

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Prov. 28.13).

When the purity of the Body of Christ is what we strive for, then what we do about confronting sin in our own lives, and in the lives of fellow-believers, is never done out of spite or vengeance, but out of an abundance of love for God and for the sake of the offender’s soul and their ultimate restoration. What was done was “sufficient for such a man” and now it was time to “forgive and comfort” (2 Cor. 2.6, 7).

We serve a God Who forgives all our iniquities, knows our frame, and “remembers that we are dust” (Ps. 103.3, 14). We can return that favor to our fellow man. “Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2 Cor. 2.8).

For reflection

1. Why is church discipline so necessary for a healthy, growing church?
2. What role is assigned to you in helping your church grow in the Lord Jesus?
3. Church discipline is, in the end, a ministry of love. Explain. What can make it something other than that?

The apostle desires them to receive the person who had done wrong, again into their communion; for he was aware of his fault, and much afflicted under his punishment. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 2.5-11

Pray Psalm 30.4-12.

In prayer, recall the many ways God has “lifted” you of late. Renew your commitment to Him and call on Him for grace to help you in all your times of need.

Sing Psalm 30.4-12.

(Madrid: *Come, Christians, Join to Sing*)

LORD, we extol Your Name! You have lifted us, O LORD!

Thanks we with joy proclaim—You have lifted us, O LORD!

Anger shall not prevail; grace will for us avail;

joy frees us from travail—

You have lifted us, O LORD!

Test Passed: 2 Corinthians 2

Firmly in You we stand—You have lifted us, O LORD!
Kept by Your gracious hand—You have lifted us, O LORD!
LORD, when You hide Your face, I cry to You for grace;
living, I'll sing Your praise—
You have lifted us, O LORD!

LORD, hear our earnest plea—You have lifted us, O LORD!
And our strong Helper be—You have lifted us, O LORD!
You turn our tears to song; praises to You belong.
Thanks is our endless song!
You have lifted us, O LORD!

3 This Is a Test

Pray Psalm 11.5, 6.

The LORD tests the righteous,
But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.
Upon the wicked He will rain coals;
Fire and brimstone and a burning wind
Shall be the portion of their cup.

Sing Psalm 11.5, 6.

(*Tidings: O Zion, Haste, Your Mission High Fulfilling*)

God tests the righteous as He tests the wicked;
see how His soul all evildoers hates.
He will rain coals; with fire will He afflict them.
Brimstone and burning wind shall ne'er abate.
Refrain v. 7
LORD, You are righteous, loving the just;
all will behold Your face who on Your mercy trust.

Read 2 Corinthians 1.1-11; meditate on verses 8-11.

Preparation

1. Why did Paul say he had written 1 Corinthians?
2. Why was it necessary to forgive the repentant sinner?

Meditation

If you're like me, when you think back on your years in school, one word will cause a chill to climb your shoulders.

Test.

Of course, we knew we were going to have them. What were they for? So the teacher could see whether we'd learned anything. I dreaded tests, and I hated taking them. What I liked about tests was getting one back with a decent grade on it, one that said, "You passed!"

Paul—acting for the Lord—put the Corinthians to the test in his first epistle. Would they learn anything? Would they take the next steps of faith and do what they must? They would and they did: "You passed!"

Ah, but there is always another test. Here as well. Would they truly forgive this man who had repented of his sin? Paul said that he had, and he urged the Corinthians to do so as well. And they needed to pass this test because if they didn't, the next test might find them snared by the wiles of the devil (v. 11). They should do the hard work on this test by sincerely forgiving their brother, so that they might grow and be stronger to face the next test their loving heavenly Father was preparing for them.

Because all such tests are from the Lord. By these tests, big and small, daily and moment-by-moment, He helps us learn and grow and become more like Jesus. So don't dread the Father's tests. Prepare well—in the Word and prayer—and you can expect to receive a passing grade.

And don't worry, when the Final Exam comes, Jesus has already passed it for all who believe in Him.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul wrote that true forgiveness and love needed to be re-established “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2.11). If only we were—truly not ignorant of his wily ways.

God stepped directly into the life of Cain to warn him of the same; but alas, he too, wasn’t paying attention to the adversary. God said to him, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Gen. 4.6, 7). Alas, he did not pay attention to God’s warning, he did not do well, and he did not rule over his murderous rage, and killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4.8).

When Jesus first began His public ministry, He got things straight with Satan from the get-go.

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matt. 4.1).

And in each instance, He quoted Scripture to vanquish him:

“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

“It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’”

“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matt. 4.4, 7, 10).

If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 8.11), then we can vanquish the adversary in the very same way Jesus did, by: Being in the Word of God and knowing the Word well enough to use it against the devil whom we are not ignorant of.

And by putting on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6.11). “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Pet. 5.8, 9). When we are aware—not ignorant of his desire to destroy—then we will successfully stand against him whatever, whenever, and however he chooses to befuddle us.

So, do we love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, and mind? (Matt. 22.37)

And do we love others as we love ourselves? (Matt. 22.39)

And are we aware of the devil’s desire to trip us up? (2 Cor. 2.11)

Most importantly, do we know where the power to accomplish this comes from? (Rom. 8.11).

As John Chrysostom stated, “This is the test of true disciples; if they obey not only when ordered to do something but on their own as well.”

“Whoever heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he” (Prov. 16.20).

For reflection

1. How should you prepare each day for the tests you will certainly face?
2. God sends tests to help us grow. What are the keys to growing through these tests?
3. When others are being tested, how should you try to encourage them?

Paul needs to see that the Corinthians are as obedient in restoring the sinner as they had been in punishing him. For the punishment might have proceeded in part from envy and malice, but if they now proceed to restore him in love, that will show that their obedience is pure. This is the test of true disciples: if they obey not only when ordered to do something but on their own as well. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 4.5

Pray Psalm 11.1-4.

What tests of your faith are you facing today? Call on the Lord to watch over you, prepare you, and empower you to pass every test He sends your way with joy and praise.

Sing Psalm 11.1-4.

(Tidings: *O Zion, Haste, Your Mission High Fulfilling*)

I trust You, LORD, my great eternal refuge!

How can you say: "Friend, flee now like a bird!

Haste to the hills! The wicked would destroy you!"?

Would you cast doubts on God and on His Word?

Refrain v. 7

LORD, You are righteous, loving the just;

all will behold Your face who on Your mercy trust.

See how the wicked bend their bows to kill you;

now, even now, they take their deadly aim!

Shall you escape? Shall darkness deep conceal you?

What shall they do who lean upon God's Name?

Refrain

Know that the LORD is in His holy temple;

firmly His throne is fixed in heav'n on high.

His eyes behold the mighty and the simple,

His eyelids test, the sons of men they try.

Refrain

4 Thanks Be to God

Pray Psalm 27.11-13.

Teach me Your way, O LORD,
And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.
Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And such as breathe out violence.
I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.

Sing Psalm 27.11-13.

(St. Denio: *Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise*)

LORD, teach us; LORD, lead us because of our foes!
Hear, LORD, when we plead for release from their woes.
Had we not believed all Your goodness to see,
our heart sorely grieved and in turmoil would be.

Read 2 Corinthians 2.1-14; meditate on verses 12-14.

Preparation

1. Why did Paul have no rest in his spirit?
2. For what did he express gratitude?

Meditation

In certain of his letters, we encounter Paul recalling or sharing about something that happened or that he did during the course of his ministry. “Bring the books and parchments.” “Demas has left me.” “I was with you in weakness.” “You ministered to me.” And so forth. These anecdotes—like the one mentioned today—can seem insignificant. But I think they tell us much about the apostle.

So he went to Troas to preach the Gospel. He writes that “a door was opened” to him—perhaps he received an invitation to come to Troas, or maybe he just thought it was a good place to go and so he went there. But can you see Paul *listening* for the Lord’s leading? Where next, Lord? Can you enter his mind as he ponders his options before the Lord? Do we do this or that, Lord?

He seems to have thought that he might find Titus in Troas, but he didn’t. He was anticipating being together with Titus, working together, catching up on the situation in Corinth and elsewhere. And when he didn’t find Titus, he moved on, crossing the Bosphorus to Macedonia, apparently in the hope of finding him there. He had Titus on the mind, and he sought the Lord to lead him to where the two might be reunited.

And always, typically Pauline, “thanks *be* to God” who is always leading us to be more like Christ and to realize more of the presence, promise, and power of His Kingdom. Thanks to God in disappointment. Thanks to God in uncertainty. Thanks to God *en route* from here to there. Thanks to God for open doors, doors slammed shut, prison doors, or no doors at all. Thanks be to God!

That’s the most basic and doubtless the most important thing to learn, both from the letters of Paul as well as personal example. For our Good Shepherd is always caring for us, always available to us, and always leading us forward in triumph. Thanks be to God!

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

In a phone conversation last Saturday night with our daughter Ashley, she shared this story, which I will try to retell.

It seems that during dinner, her children Reagan and Ralph, who both have birthdays in June, began regaling her with all their plans for the spectacular cakes they envisioned she would make for them. Nothing elaborate, mind you, just a cake in the shape of a piano for Reagan and a basketball cake for Ralph. (As an aside, yes, she can actually do that).

Anyway, this conversation was taking place the day after Ashley had single-handedly prepared a dessert table for approximately 160 souls attending a church outreach dinner.

She also teaches school every day; and had not been feeling well for about a week. Suffice it to say, she was exhausted.

So, after the kids had finished with the “visions of sugar-plums dancing in their heads” she stated: “I hear your plans, and they sound good, but I’m so tired, I just can’t even find the strength to have more of this conversation right now.”

We can all empathize.

But that’s when her son, George, piped up with this classic line: “You know Mom, in just a few minutes, after dinner, you will be able to sit down in your chair, so I think you should be thankful for that!”

I don’t know about you, but every time I think about that conversation, it makes me laugh!

But George, and Paul, have a point and are right on the same wavelength.

“Thanks to God in disappointment. Thanks to God in uncertainty. Thanks to God *en route* from here to there. Thanks to God for open doors, doors slammed shut, prison doors, or no doors at all. Thanks be to God!”

“...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5.18).

“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.

Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and

His truth endures to all generations” (Ps. 100.4, 5).

“Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven!

For His mercy endures forever” (Ps. 136.26).

When we are beyond ourselves in strength, God wants us to fall back on Him, knowing with great certainty, that the eternal God is our refuge, “and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33.27).

Thanks to God for time after dinner to sit in our chair.

For reflection

1. What are some things during the day that cue you to give thanks to God?
2. Why is it so important that we give thanks in everything?
3. What can you do to become more consistent in giving thanks to the Lord?

Test Passed: 2 Corinthians 2

Paul was in constant affliction everywhere he went, but this did not draw him into despair. On the contrary, he rejoiced and gave thanks, because although persecution might seem like a disgrace, in fact it was a very great honor. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 5.1

Pray Psalm 27.1-10.

Cast all your burdens on the Lord. Call on Him to give you a clear conscience so that you may serve Him this day in simplicity and godly sincerity.

Sing Psalm 27.1-10.

(St. Denio: *Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise*)

LORD, You are our Light and our Savior most dear!
You guard us with might; therefore, whom shall we fear?
Though evil surround us, our enemies fall;
no harm shall confound us when on You we call.

One thing we request but to dwell with You, LORD.
Your beauty to test and to think on Your Word.
In trouble You hide us secure in Your grace;
no foe may o'erride us: We sing of Your praise.

Hear, LORD, when we cry and be gracious, we pray!
LORD, do not deny us Your favor this day!
Our help, our salvation, though others may fall,
preserve our good station when on You we call.

5 The Fragrance of Christ

Pray Psalm 23.1, 2.

The LORD *is* my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.

Sing Psalm 23.1, 2.

(The Gift of Love: *Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire*)
Because the LORD my Shepherd is I shall not want, for I am His!
He makes me lie in pastures full; I rest in Him by waters still.

Read 2 Corinthians 2.1-16; meditate on verses 14-16.

Preparation

1. How did Paul describe himself and other believers?
2. How was this received?

Meditation

We are familiar with the Peanuts® character Pigpen. Everywhere he goes, a cloud of dust stirs up around him. Even in the dead of winter, during a snowstorm, Pigpen's dust cloud is his defining attribute.

Just so, the Lord intends a "fragrance of Christ" to emanate from us in all our words and deeds (v. 14). We are God's diffusers in the world, to emit "the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Wherever you go in your Personal Mission Field, whomever you're with, and whatever you're doing, something that "smells" of the beauty, compassion, loveliness, truth, and righteousness of Jesus can be made known, arising from your soul as surely as the dust does around good Pigpen.

Those who know the Lord need us to be a faithful fragrance of Christ that they might be encouraged to know, love, and serve Him more. To believers in Jesus, the fragrance of Christ will be sweet, welcome, and a source of fuller and more abundant life in the Lord (v. 15).

But that won't be true of everyone who catches a whiff of Jesus in us. To those who are still dead in their trespasses and sin, Jesus will have the odor of death (vv. 15, 16). He will be perceived as a threat to their "liberty", a killjoy for their fun, or a cruel taskmaster for a lifestyle they do not prefer.

Only grace can awaken such people from the deadness of sin to newness of life in Christ; and the way we live our faith before them can bring an environment of grace into their lives, which may, over time, make them more inclined to "smell the roses" of Jesus and come to faith in Him.

How will you diffuse the fragrance of Jesus today?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

The psalmist David prayed, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life..." (Ps. 23.6).

Most assuredly, we know that if we shower and lather up vigorously, we will smell considerably better. And we know that if we launder our clothing, they will not only look better but will emanate a more pleasant aroma.

However, the opposite is also true.

“Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor” (Eccl. 10.1).

Beware, Christian, it is the one “respected for wisdom and honor” emanating a foul odor when folly is displayed in that life.

The psalmist David made note of this: “There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness” (Ps. 38.3-5).

Either way, as Paul stated, we give off an aroma either of our own uncleanness and sin; or an aroma of death to those caught up in sin— “the aroma of death leading to death” (2 Cor. 2.16).

The other option being “the aroma of life leading to life” (2 Cor. 2.16).

“Surely”, as David prayed, this is a possibility when “we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (2 Cor. 2.15).

“And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2.16).

“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
Or who may stand in His holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart...” (Ps. 24.3, 4).

“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” (2 Cor. 2.14).

Surely—through the power and blood of Jesus, and His indwelling Spirit—we can triumphantly exude a godly aroma of life and death all the days of our lives. Leaving behind us a virtual jet stream of goodness and mercy. Indeed, “The Fragrance of Christ.”

For reflection

1. How should you prepare each day to make sure the fragrance of Christ is with you all day long?
2. How do you expect the fragrance of Christ in you to encourage your fellow believers today?
3. How can you know when you are more a “fly in the ointment” than the “fragrance of Christ”?

The light, even when it blinds someone, is still light. Honey, though it is bitter to those who are sick, is still sweet. So also the gospel has a sweet savor to all, even if those who do not believe it are lost. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 5.2

Pray Psalm 23.3-6.

Pray that God the Father will bless you with more of the fragrance of Jesus, so that His good and mercy will follow and flow from you in all you do.

Sing Psalm 23.3-6.

(The Gift of Love: *Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire*)

My soul He quickens and will bless; He leads in paths of righteousness.

Though I may walk in death’s dark vale, I shall not fear – He will not fail!

The LORD is ever by my side; His rod and staff with me abide.

A table rich for me He spreads; with oil my LORD anoints my head.

Goodness and mercy, full and free, shall ever after follow me,
and in the house of God, my LORD, shall I abide forevermore!

6 Before God

Pray Psalm 52.1-4.

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The goodness of God endures continually.
Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.
You love evil more than good,
Lying rather than speaking righteousness.

Selah

You love all devouring words,
You deceitful tongue.

Sing Psalm 52.1-4.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words both harsh and strong with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

Read 2 Corinthians 2.1-17; meditate on verse 17.

Prepare

1. What did Paul say he was not doing?
2. How did he speak?

Meditation

In this verse Paul was anticipating the Corinthians' response to his comments in verses 14-16. He had just written that God intended them to diffuse the fragrance (knowledge) of Christ in every place, throughout their Personal Mission Fields. But he also warned them that some people would be offended. "And who is sufficient?" for that?

Well, not those who were showing up after Paul, seeking to scoop off followers by softening the demands of the Gospel. False apostles either perverted or diluted the Gospel message. And there were apparently many of them, just as there are today. Their motives were not pure. They were not sincere in their preaching and teaching but were worshipping the god of their belly, seeking above all financial gain or prestige (cf. Rom. 16.17, 18; Phil. 3.17-19).

Not so Paul. He knew Whom he served. His motives were pure and sincere. He preached and taught as one who knew himself to be always under the watchful eye of the Father and Jesus Christ. He told the truth, even when it was hard to hear, and he called those who heard him or read his epistles to embrace the Word of God and align themselves with its teaching, come what may.

When you're living for Jesus, diffusing the knowledge of the Lord in every place, you can expect to bless many and offend some. This is what Jesus experienced. And Paul. And faithful saints in every age. But we can be sufficient for this if we continue looking to God and seeking the face of Jesus. For we can do all things through Christ Jesus, Who strengthens us (Phil. 4.13).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

“But who is adequate for such a task as this?

Only those who, like ourselves, are
men of integrity,
sent by God,
speaking with Christ’s power,
with God’s eye upon us.

We are not like those hucksters—
and there are many of them—
whose idea in getting out the Gospel
is to make a good living out of it” (2 Cor. 2.16, 17 TLB).

There are many such hucksters running rampant today throughout the fields of Christendom spreading a health, wealth, power, and popularity message that must be irksome to the great “cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12.1), many of whom were mocked, scourged, chained, imprisoned, stoned, and sawn in two. They also “wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth...” (Heb. 11.36-38).

Yes, that great cloud of witnesses, who did not experience health, wealth, power, or popularity. But what they did experience was the love of God and His careful attention to them: “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints” (Ps. 116.15).

Every word of God is pure and worth sharing in its fullness (Prov. 30.5, 6).

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Ps. 19.7-9).

Not a word in there to woo hucksters or their followers.
But plenty in there for us to base our lives and work upon.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I AM gentle and lowly in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11.28-30).

With Jesus, filled with His Holy Spirit, in sincerity, as from God, we speak and work in the sight of God. Not hucksters for money, power, health, wealth, or fame, but workers for His glory only, spreading the aroma of Christ throughout our Personal Mission Field, so that others can share in the love of God and experience life in His Kingdom both now and forevermore.

For reflection

1. What was Paul’s motive for sharing the Good News of Jesus? What is yours?
2. What would you say is the key for keeping our witness pure and sincere?
3. Whom will you encourage today in their witness for the Lord?

Paul will not imitate the false apostles, who claim rewards for themselves. For corruption occurs when one sells for money what one ought to give freely. Paul speaks in Christ, not by his own wisdom but by the power which comes from him. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 5.3

Test Passed: 2 Corinthians 2

Pray Psalm 52.8, 9.

Pray that God will make you fruitful today in righteousness, and that you may be a fragrance of Jesus in everything you do.

Sing Psalm 52.8, 9.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!

Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!

Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

7 A Test Passed

Pray Psalm 71.14-16.

But I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know their limits.
*I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.*

Sing Psalm 71.14-16, 3.

(Solid Rock: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*)

But as for me my voice I raise to sing in hope and constant praise!
With saving grace my voice will swell Your never-ending grace to tell.

Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

Review 2 Corinthians 2.1-17; meditate on verse 9.

Preparation

1. Why did Paul write 1 Corinthians?

2. What was he testing?

Meditation

In a sense, all of 1 Corinthians was a test. Paul challenged the immature and worldly practices the Corinthians had become stuck in and called them to break free of their selfish, schismatic ways and get on the growth path with Jesus. The report from Titus was that they were working on all that Paul had written, beginning with having excommunicated an unrepentant sinner.

2 Corinthians celebrates God's grace in moving the Corinthians to obedience. Next, beginning in chapter 3, Paul will go on to enlarge their vision and stretch their faith. He began that process here, in chapter 2, by calling them to receive the man they had disfellowshipped and to love him back into the Body of Christ. They passed a major test by doing what Paul commanded, and now Paul was helping them to take on the next test—yet another test of love. Had they grown enough to reach out and restore this repentant sinner?

The Christian life is like this, God marks out our daily path with tests. Will we obey His Word? Resist the devil and his incessant temptations? Stand firm in the Word of God? Keep our eyes on Jesus and follow Him to a greater degree of sanctification? We need these tests to grow in our faith and become more like Jesus. Without them, we will simply settle into some comfortable rut of faith where we're never challenged, of little service to others, and hardly growing in the Lord.

Jesus is ever leading us forward in faith and in triumphs over sin. His goal is to make us more like Him, and we know how many tests He had to endure. We are not sufficient to pass all these tests, but God is. His strength is made perfect in our weakness, but we must yield to Him, keep focused on Him, and walk the path of loving obedience marked out by His Word. As we do, we will diffuse the fragrance of Christ throughout our world, test to test and glory to glory.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul wrote the abridged textbook on love in 1 Corinthians 13.

Then he threw down the gauntlet by saying: “Reaffirm your love to him” (2 Cor. 2.9).

Nobody was left wondering: “What does he mean by love? What does that look like? How do we do that?”

Jesus showed us how.

After Peter’s betrayal, Jesus questioned him three times (Jn. 21.15-17):

“Do you love Me more than these?”

“Do you love Me?”

“Do you love Me?”

Then Jesus gave Peter three opportunities to re-establish his relationship:

“Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

“Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

“Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”

Finally, Jesus reaffirmed Peter with three commands to obey on his restoration path:

“Feed My lambs.”

“Tend My sheep.”

“Feed My sheep.”

God is constantly growing us through testing:

“The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,

but the LORD tests the hearts” (Prov. 17.3).

“The LORD is in His holy temple, the LORD’s throne is in heaven;

His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The LORD tests the righteous...” (Ps. 11.4, 5).

“But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel,

even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts” (1 Thess. 2.4).

Jesus’ goal is to make us more like Himself; which often entails testing—some pop quizzes, some final exams. But “we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4.15, 16).

Reaffirming love, God’s love, can be a difficult test—think full sentence answers vs. multiple choice. Loving correctly, even someone that we love, can be challenging. How much more so, to reaffirm love to those who have committed sins, and maybe even sins against us?

We cannot do this in our own strength or power. Success is only achieved by God’s grace as He enables us to pass the test with flying colors, obeying Him carefully and rightly (Lk. 1.37).

“As we do, we will diffuse the fragrance of Christ throughout our world, test to test and glory to glory.”

For reflection

1. How do you experience God testing throughout the day?
2. How would you counsel a new believer to prepare for these tests?
3. How can you help other believers pass the tests God puts in their path?

As far as anyone can tell, Paul was commending the Corinthians for their obedience in other respects. They had already put matters right in their church administration, and now he was asking them to be obedient in this matter as well. Ambrosiaster (f. 366-384), Commentary on Paul’s Epistles

Test Passed: 2 Corinthians 2

Pray Psalm 71.1, 2, 7, 8, 12-13.

Give thanks to God for His salvation and strength. Look to Him for mercy and grace for all your times of need today.

Sing Psalm 71.1, 2, 7, 8, 12, 13.

(Solid Rock: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*)

In You, O LORD, I refuge claim; O let me never be ashamed.
in righteousness deliver me; incline Your ear and hear my plea.

Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

While many see in me a sign, I shelter in Your strength will find.

LORD, fill my mouth with endless praise and with Your glory all my days.

Refrain

O God be not too far from me; my ever-present Helper be!

Consume and shame my enemies; let them reproached and humbled be.

Refrain

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why did Paul not make the trip to Corinth he had promised?
2. How should you respond to people who sin against you and then repent?
3. What does it mean for you to be the fragrance of Christ to your world?
4. How can you be sure that your motives are always pure and sincere?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 103 Reynolds Lane, West Grove, PA 19390.

Thank you.