I I CORINTHIANS

The church in Corinth was now about five years old. Its founder, the Apostle Paul, was laboring in Macedonia, far to the north. There he met Titus who brought him news of the work in Corinth. Paul felt it necessary to write the church a letter and send it back with Titus.

Chapter One

2 Cor. 1:3-10 (New Living Testament)

All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of every mercy and the God who comforts us. [4] He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. [5] You can be sure that the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. [6] So when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your benefit and salvation! For when God comforts us, it is so that we, in turn, can be an encouragement to you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. [7] We are confident that as you share in suffering, you will also share God's comfort. [8] I think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and completely overwhelmed, and we thought we would never live through it. [9] In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we learned not to rely on ourselves, but on God who can raise the dead. [10] And he did deliver us from mortal danger. And we are confident that he will continue to deliver us.

With the exception of his letter to the Galatians, Paul opened his letters with thanksgiving. In verses 3-7, he expressed gratitude to God for His divine comfort. In verses 8-10 he thanked God for divine deliverance. Paul knew suffering; he had been beaten, imprisoned and deprived. Yet through it all, there was a wonderful presence of God.

In verses 12-24, Paul defended his own character and ministry. Some in Corinth had grown suspicious of Paul's motives. Why?

1) Paul had promised the people he would return, but so far he had not done so.
2) He told them he would use a different route than he actually used.
3) In I Cor., he had told the church to deal with the man involved in incest in a strict way; later he seemed to call for a milder reaction.

Not all of our plans can be accomplished like clockwork. We are in a battle between God and Satan. Sometimes there has to be a change in strategy.

Chapter Two

In I Corinthians 5 we learned of the fellow involved in incest. He had been dealt with via church discipline. But apparently the Corinthians would not now forgive him. Paul instructed them to forgive; so some of the believers accused Paul of being fickle. How easy it is to judge other people. Sometimes we not only fail to forgive but to forget them and move on.

As a pastor, I can understand Paul’s joy at the progress made in the Corinthian church.

2 Cor. 2:14 But thanks be to God, who made us his captives and leads us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume.

We should rejoice when we receive good news of a believer’s blessing, or that a church that preaches Christ and the cross is growing. The Gospel is “good news,” which should call for positive response.

Chapter Three

Some “teachers” from Jerusalem had arrived, complete with letter of commendation, which caused the Corinthians to believe in their ministry. Unfortunately, their doctrine was weird and false. They insisted that the Corinthians believers, for the most part Greeks, of course, needed not only to believe in Jesus, but also keep the Jewish ceremonial law. Paul responded:

2 Cor. 3:7-18

That old system of law etched in stone led to death, yet it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses’ face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away. [8] Shouldn’t we expect far greater glory when the Holy Spirit is giving life? [9] If the old covenant, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new covenant, which makes us right with God! [10] In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new covenant. [11] So if the old covenant, which has been set aside, was full of glory, then the new
1 covenant, which remains forever, has far greater glory. [12] Since this new covenant gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. [13] We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory fading away. [14] But the people's minds were hardened, and even to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, a veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ. [15] Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand. [16] But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, then the veil is taken away. [17] Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom. [18] And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.

Paul recounted the marvelous story of Moses who had met the Lord on Mt. Sinai. When he came down from the mountain his face shone with the glory of the Lord - so much so that Moses put a veil over his face. It was not the Ten Commandments he had received atop the mountain that put that shine of glory there - no, it was the presence of the Lord Himself. Paul here is teaching that it is not keeping the law (which is not possible) that saves us, but rather Christ Himself.

Chapter Four

The "light of Christ’s gospel” needs no man-made addition to make it effective:

2 Cor. 4:1-6  And so, since God in his mercy has given us this wonderful ministry, we never give up. [2] We reject all shameful and underhanded methods. We do not try to trick anyone, and we do not distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know that. [3] If the Good News we preach is veiled from anyone, it is a sign that they are perishing. [4] Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them. They don't understand the message we preach about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God. [5] We don't go around preaching about ourselves; we preach Christ Jesus, the Lord. All we say about ourselves is that we are your servants because of what Jesus has done for us. [6] For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made us understand that this light is the brightness of the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

Did Paul suffer? Did he have “down days?” Oh yes!  Read his testimony:
2 Cor. 4:7-15  
But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shine within us—is held
in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our
glorious power is from God and is not our own.
[8] We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken.
We are perplexed, but we don't give up and quit. [9] We are hunted down, but God
never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going. [10]
Through suffering, these bodies of ours constantly share in the death of Jesus so that
the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.
[11] Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that
the life of Jesus will be obvious in our dying bodies. [12] So we live in the face of
death, but it has resulted in eternal life for you.
[13] But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the
psalmist had when he said, "I believed in God, and so I speak." [14] We know that
the same God who raised our Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us
to himself along with you. [15] All of these things are for your benefit. And as God's
grace brings more and more people to Christ, there will be great thanksgiving, and
God will receive more and more glory.

Meditate now on Paul's conclusion:

2 Cor. 4:16-18  That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our
spirits are being renewed every day. [17] For our present troubles are quite small
and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that
will last forever! [18] So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather,
we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be
over, but the joys to come will last forever.

compared with what awaits us are nothing!

Chapter Five

Again Paul reminded the Corinthians - and us - that the eternal audit is coming. He
never had it easy in this life. Yet he brimmed over with hope. He was truly the great
optimist. His body was never very strong. But what difference did any of that make to
Paul?

2 Cor. 5:1-10  For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken
down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have a home in heaven, an
eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. [2] We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long for the day when we will put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. [3] For we will not be spirits without bodies, but we will put on new heavenly bodies. [4] Our dying bodies make us groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and have no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by everlasting life. [5] God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. [6] So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. [7] That is why we live by believing and not by seeing. [8] Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. [9] So our aim is to please him always, whether we are here in this body or away from this body. [10] For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in our bodies.

In eternity, we will not be “disembodied spirits” - spooks! No our souls and spirits will again be merged with our bodies, only time they are resurrected bodies such as Christ had (he who was the first-fruit - prototype).

There was another motivation Paul had that superseded all his personal hurts and discouragements: 2 Cor. 5:11-21 It is because we know this solemn fear of the Lord that we work so hard to persuade others. God knows we are sincere, and I hope you know this, too. [12] Are we trying to pat ourselves on the back again? No, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us, so you can answer those who brag about having a spectacular ministry rather than having a sincere heart before God. [13] If it seems that we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. [14] Whatever we do, it is because Christ’s love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for everyone, we also believe that we have all died to the old life we used to live. [15] He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. Instead, they will live to please Christ, who died and was raised for them.

[16] So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now! [17] What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun! [18] All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. [19] For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. [20]
We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!" [21] For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Reconciled to God! There are two parts to this reconciliation: the actual bringing us together at salvation and the continuing reconciliation that goes on in us in which we become like Christ and, through Him accomplish the will of the Father. It becomes our desire to do the will of the Father and it is from this that we experience the joy of our salvation.

Chapter Six

In these verses, Paul teaches the Christian how to react when he or she is slandered or verbally abused. 2 Cor. 6:4-10 In everything we do we try to show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. [5] We have been beaten, been put in jail, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. [6] We have proved ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, our sincere love, and the power of the Holy Spirit. [7] We have faithfully preached the truth.

God's power has been working in us. We have righteousness as our weapon, both to attack and to defend ourselves. [8] We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. [9] We are well known, but we are treated as unknown. We live close to death, but here we are, still alive. We have been beaten within an inch of our lives. [10] Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.

What is the secret here? How can a person be subjected to that kind of persecution, abuse and suffering and still stay spiritual, sane and productive? In the preceding chapter Paul taught us that followers of Christ are RECONCILED to the will of God, not our own comfort and pleasure.

I doubt seriously that anyone can work in God's kingdom without coming under difficult times, even attack. Satan uses whatever he can to abuse our lives. But as we grow closer to God, drawing on His very own nature within us. We become like Him and so our reactions are changed.

Now Paul encourages the Corinthian believers not to fall prey to the world system: 2 Cor. 6:14-18 [14] Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can goodness be a
partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? [15] What harmony can there be between Christ and the Devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? [16] And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. [17] Therefore, come out from them and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. [18] And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Is holiness negative? No. Holiness equates “wholeness.”

Chapter 7

2 Cor. 7:2-12 Please open your hearts to us. We have not done wrong to anyone. We have not led anyone astray. We have not taken advantage of anyone. [3] I'm not saying this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts forever. We live or die together with you. [4] I have the highest confidence in you, and my pride in you is great. You have greatly encouraged me; you have made me happy despite all our troubles. [5] When we arrived in Macedonia there was no rest for us. Outside there was conflict from every direction, and inside there was fear. [6] But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. [7] His presence was a joy, but so was the news he brought of the encouragement he received from you. When he told me how much you were looking forward to my visit, and how sorry you were about what had happened, and how loyal your love is for me, I was filled with joy! [8] I am no longer sorry that I sent that letter to you, though I was sorry for a time, for I know that it was painful to you for a little while. [9] Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to have remorse and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way. [10] For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. But sorrow without repentance is the kind that results in death. [11] Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish the wrongdoer. You showed that you have done everything you could to make things right. [12] My purpose was not to write about who did the wrong or who was wronged. I wrote to you so that in the sight of God you could show how much you really do care for us.

I suspect that Paul spent many lonely days. Even today there are those who will attack his memory and teaching, putting wrong accents on his words, creating a stern, hard,
difficult man out of this tender and most affectionate apostle. What a man! What a
preacher and teacher! In these verses Paul recounted his concern over them while
waiting for Titus at Troas. He always carried a burden for the churches he founded.

But what joy when Titus finally arrived to bring him good news of the Corinthians’
progress in Christ: 2 Cor. 7:13-16 We have been encouraged by this. In addition to
our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was at
the way you welcomed him and set his mind at ease. [14] I had told him how proud I
was of you—and you didn’t disappoint me. I have always told you the truth, and
now my boasting to Titus has also proved true! [15] Now he cares for you more than
ever when he remembers the way you listened to him and welcomed him with such
respect and deep concern. [16] I am very happy now because I have complete
confidence in you.

Chapter Eight

Chapter 8 (and 9) give us strong teaching on Christian benevolence. A true Spirit-filled
believer is a giver. It goes beyond tithing which, of course, should be considered the
absolute minimum. Paul teaches us vital principles here concerning giving:

2 Cor. 8:1-6 Now I want to tell you, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his
kindness has done for the churches in Macedonia. [2] Though they have been going
through much trouble and hard times, their wonderful joy and deep poverty have
overflowed in rich generosity. [3] For I can testify that they gave not only what they
could afford but far more. And they did it of their own free will. [4] They begged us
again and again for the gracious privilege of sharing in the gift for the Christians in
Jerusalem. [5] Best of all, they went beyond our highest hopes, for their first action
was to dedicate themselves to the Lord and to us for whatever directions God might
give them. [6] So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first
place, to return to you and encourage you to complete your share in this ministry of
giving.

A famine or some kind of economic collapse had devastated Judea and caused a great
amount of grief to the saints in Jerusalem. The believers there were of minimal means
and were also victims of great persecution and social ostracism. As Paul traveled across
Europe, he took collections to give to them.

2 Cor. 8:7-13 Since you excel in so many ways—you have so much faith, such gifted
speakers, such knowledge, such enthusiasm, and such love for us—now I want you
to excel also in this gracious ministry of giving. [8] I am not saying you must do it,
even though the other churches are eager to do it. This is one way to prove your love is real. [9] You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was very rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich. [10] I suggest that you finish what you started a year ago, for you were the first to propose this idea, and you were the first to begin doing something about it. [11] Now you should carry this project through to completion just as enthusiastically as you began it. Give whatever you can according to what you have. [12] If you are really eager to give, it isn't important how much you are able to give. God wants you to give what you have, not what you don't have.

As we respond in love by giving to others, we need to realize that our gifts may not always be received with the gratitude we would like. But that should not matter because we give as unto Christ.

Chapter Nine

What motivates the follower of Christ to be a giver? Some give, I suppose, because they feel obligated. They look at an usher the same way some folks look at an IRS man. That is not a healthy reason for giving. The motive behind true Christian giving is love to the Lord. Some television preachers have taken this "plant you seed idea" to the point of absurdity. While it is true that God blesses us, that's not why we give. God loves a cheerful giver. Giving is contagious. First Assembly here excels in giving! Others respond when they see us give - it's a chain reaction.

2 Cor. 9:6-15  Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. [7] You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully. [8] And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. [9] As the Scriptures say, "Godly people give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will never be forgotten." [10] For God is the one who gives seed to the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will give you many opportunities to do good, and he will produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

[11] Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out in thanksgiving to God. [12] So two good things will happen—the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanksgiving to God. [13] You will be glorifying God through your generous gifts. For your generosity to them will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. [14] And they will pray for
you with deep affection because of the wonderful grace of God shown through you. [15] Thank God for his Son—a gift too wonderful for words!

Chapter Ten

Paul teaches here about spiritual warfare. 2 Cor. 10:3-5  We are human, but we don't wage war with human plans and methods. [4] We use God's mighty weapons, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil's strongholds. [5] With these weapons we break down every proud argument that keeps people from knowing God. With these weapons we conquer their rebellious ideas, and we teach them to obey Christ.

This is a battle of the spirit world. The weapons God gives us are love, patience, the gifts of the Spirit, which are mighty to the “pulling down of strongholds.”

That fifth verse in the King James is vital to our understanding: 2 Cor. 10:5  Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

The only way God, Satan or anyone else can get to you is through your BRAIN! Your mind! You cannot help a thought that rampages through your head BUT YOU CAN MOST CERTAINLY WITHHOLD IT FROM GOING THROUGH AGAIN AND AGAIN. Thoughts that are from God will build you up, encourage you, strengthen you. Thoughts from Satan will bring fear, uncertainty, anger, etc. You can easily identify the thoughts in your mind right now. By an act of your will bring those unhealthy thoughts into captivity - put them in a cage. How? Sing a song of praise, begin to thank the Lord, read a scripture, etc. You are responsible for your thought life. This is an incredibly helpful passage of scripture. Proverbs 23:7  For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he:

In the rest of this chapter, Paul makes reference to his outward appearance, which many thought wasn’t all that great. 2 Cor. 10:10  For some say, "Don't worry about Paul. His letters are demanding and forceful, but in person he is weak, and his speeches are really bad!" Paul’s answer in verse 11: The ones who say this must realize that we will be just as demanding and forceful in person as we are in our letters. Paul responded, in effect, “Listen....I will be everything God needs me to be so stop looking at the outward appearance!”

Chapter Eleven
Here Paul teaches on faithfulness. 2 Cor. 11:2 I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. For I promised you as a pure bride to one husband, Christ.

We are the "betrothed" or "engaged" bride of Christ Himself. We will be eternally given to Him at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. When the virgin Mary learned she was pregnant with Jesus, she was engaged (betrothed) to Joseph. They had not been married. She was a virgin, pregnant by the Holy Ghost. Joseph was faced with a severe problem: His alternatives were these...he could divorce Mary or he could accuse her of fornication before the town judges and she might have been stoned to death. The scriptures use the phrase, "Put her away privily." That means divorce. But they were not yet married! True...but the only way you could break an engagement in those days was a divorce. Engagement was just as binding as marriage. Once engaged, a couple was expected to remain pure. In our salvation (engagement), Christ has every right to expect us to remain faithful to Him.

Chapter Twelve

Here Paul relates a very sacred and personal moment in his life. 2 Cor. 12:2-4 I was caught up into the third heaven fourteen years ago. [3] Whether my body was there or just my spirit, I don't know; only God knows. [4] But I do know that I was caught up into paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be told. Most scholars believe this happened when Paul was still in Antioch prior to entering the mission field. The event cemented in Paul's mind the reality of ETERNITY. Once given that vision, Paul had little interest in anything else but eternity. Romans 8:18 Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later. How did Paul know about that "glory" that awaited him? He had seen it in that vision! It is small wonder Paul had such a ministry. He stood with one foot planted in eternity and the other upon the grace of God. He gave of himself tirelessly.

Chapter Thirteen

This is the last chapter and Paul ends with a flourish. He tells the Corinthians he will return to them. They needed to be prepared for his return: Verse 5: "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith!"

Spiritual self-examination is always helpful. Verse 11: "Become complete." Strong believers are not one-dimensional, but well-rounded in God, lacking in none of God's graces.

NEXT WEEK: GALATIANS AND EPHESIANS