

HOW THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS SPREAD

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

Chapter 2 may be the most personal of all the recorded words of the Apostle Paul. He opens with a heavy heart, filled with sorrow for the conflict he had experienced with the Corinthian believers. His strong stance concerning some of the immoral practices they had ignored had created backlash from the church (1Cor. 5:1-6).

Some felt Paul was overly harsh and even unloving. What Paul experienced has unfortunately been the standard experience of God's prophets through the centuries. Prophets, more times than not, have been misunderstood men. Paul is no exception.

Nevertheless, the chapter may begin with Paul's personal experience but it ends with the utter triumph of Jesus Christ! The Gospel continues to be spread, saturating the Roman empire.

As we follow Paul's experience in chapter 2, let's use the outline below:

- I. The Tears Paul Shed (vv. 1-13)**
- II. The Triumph Jesus Secured (v. 14a)**
- III. The Tidings the Church Spread (vv. 14b-17)**

I. The Tears Paul Shed (vv. 1-13)

Paul begins the chapter (a corpus which actually begins at 1:23) explaining the reason he did not visit the Corinthians. He writes, "But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness" (v. 1). His absence was both for their benefit (1:23-24) as well as his (vv. 2-3). For Paul, no enjoyment could be experienced by rebuking the Corinthians further. His life's goal was to promote joy, not grief. Paul's joy would be the "joy of you all" (v. 3).

While it is not without precedent to hear of some pastors abusing the flock with abrasive, harsh and unloving preaching, too often when the pastor stands in the pulpit to speak God's Word truthfully and completely, he is misunderstood as causing grief and pain rather than speaking prophetically under God's anointing. Paul questioned the Corinthians' silence toward a man committing incest! (1 Cor. 5). Should he then be accused as being unloving?

Hardly a week goes by that a Bible-believing preacher somewhere is not accused of being unloving because he dared question a lifestyle which our culture deems morally acceptable. In fact, more times than not, he is accused of hate-crimes by the mainstream media.

It is as if the Apostle Paul is saying to the Corinthians, "I don't mind telling you: I shed tears over the first letter I sent you." One way to gauge whether a person is actually being harsh is to test their attitude about the message they deliver. If it is a strong message, is there arrogance portrayed, or is there a humble spirit? Does the messenger gloat about the strong message, boast about being courageous to speak it, or is he of a humble mind, appearing to grieve over the action of delivering it?

One thing is for sure: Paul's heart was profusely bleeding because he had to deliver such a stinging blow to the church he dearly loved. He laments, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (v. 4).

Paul expresses his humanity in all its weakness. Every servant who works for the Lord must sooner or later realize he or she is but human. All our strength for Kingdom good comes entirely from the Lord Jesus.

Reflection Connection

Reflect upon a time when you experienced grief over past actions you knew were right yet you nevertheless experienced severe pain. Be prepared to share with the entire group if possible.



The Apostle continues, “But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow” (vv. 5-7). Now that the sinning man had been disciplined and repented, Paul encouraged the complete restoration for him from the church (v. 10).

In addition, Paul speaks Satan’s devices, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (v. 11). The Greek term translated “devices” literally means, “well thought out plans.” He is the master strategist. We must resist playing games with the devil. In the end, according to Paul, the triumphs of the warrior are sure.

II. The Triumph Jesus Secured (v. 14a)

When the Romans fought and won a battle, they had a victory march. The greatest honor given to the Roman General was during this march. In order for the general to be honored, he had to have had at least 5,000 slain enemies and a substantial amount of territory gained. What an impressive procession this would have been. Christians have their own victory march they may celebrate.

Paul affirms, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place” (v. 14). Jesus is our victorious general. He leads a procession nothing can stop! According to Paul, the cross was where the battle was both waged and won.

Satan can no longer control us.

First, at the cross, Jesus *spoiled* the enemy. Paul elsewhere explains, “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15). The term translated “spoiled” means “to disarm,” “to strip” of power. The devil got the best of man and woman in Eden (Gen. 1:1-6). Consequently, all their weakness were transferred to their progeny. Death reigned supremely (Heb. 2:14). At the cross, however, our soul’s enemies were stripped of power. Satan can no longer control us. The fear of death vanishes through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Second, at the cross, Jesus *showed* the enemy. Paul speaks of making “manifest.” Sin, death, and hell were exposed and publicly disgraced at the cross of Christ (cp. Matt. 1:19). Satan was exposed as a murderer. Sin was openly revealed as ugly. We now are ushered into the presence of the Almighty through the power of the cross.

Third, at the cross, Jesus *shattered* the enemy. We were not only delivered from the enemy’s hands, we were also rid of our enemy! All else before Calvary was only preliminary to the main event—the cross of Jesus Christ. The victory march of Jesus Christ is on! There is nowhere His victory does not extend. The “gates of hell” will never prevail against Jesus and His mighty army!

Reflection Connection

Would you say you fear death? Explain. Is death something you feel all people should fear? How is it different with Christians?



III. The Tidings the Church Spread (vv. 14b-17)

The victory march Jesus assures is to be spread into every land on the face of the globe. The church is to saturate the culture with the Gospel. We spread what Christ secures.

Paul continues, “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (vv. 15-17). As believers, we are not required to fight for victory; Jesus has already secured victory. Rather we are to fight from victory.

Reflection Connection

Explain how your life is an aroma of Christ in worship to God. Now ponder your life as an aroma to others. How do you think you are received?

First, we fight from a *personal* victory. Remember, it is God Who, “always causeth us to triumph in Christ.” He leads you and me in triumph. Hence, we claim His victory in our daily walk. No matter the circumstances or the battlefield each of us face. He leads us in victory. He is a General Who never has or ever will lose a victory march!

Second, we fight from a *perennial* victory. He “always” leads us in victory (v. 14a). Indeed our loss remains impossible if we are standing with Jesus Christ. Many Christians feel defeated, beaten, bloody, and hopeless. However, He “always” causes us to triumph. Will you believe your feelings or stand squarely on your faith?

Third, we fight from a *powerful* victory. The knowledge of Jesus spreads and spreads. We take the victory of Jesus into every experience we face. All nations of the earth will eventually be touched by the message of Jesus. The world is defeated and doesn’t even know it! Our job is not to win the battle. Our job is to point people to our General, King Jesus.

Like a powerful aroma, the Gospel scent permeates everything it touches. Paul speaks of the “savour of death” and the “savour of life.” The term translated “savour” is a word meaning fragrance or aroma. In the Greco-Roman victory march, a priest would burn incense to some reigning deity, a sweet smelling aroma would fill the air. Similarly, the Gospel has its very own aroma. For some it is the fresh scent of life; to others, however, it becomes the stench of death and judgment.

As for believers, our lives are to be a precious aroma to the Father. In our own stead, we are but the defiled odor of death. In Christ, our lives remain a “sweet aroma” to God. In addition, our lives are a pleasant scent to the saints. We are, in Paul’s words, a “fragrance of life.” Question: Do others receive an aroma of life from our lives? Do they gain the perfume of the Lord Jesus?

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Golden Greek Nugget

Paul asks, "who is sufficient for these things?" (v. 16). The Greek term translated "sufficient" is *hikanos* which means "enough." It is used of Pilate's attempt to satisfy the people in the release of Barabbas rather than Jesus (Mark 15:15). Paul means to say no one of us no matter our skill, strength, or resolve is able to live our lives for the Lord Jesus. It is only in Him and through Him our lives are pleasing to the Father.

On the other hand, we are a perilous aroma to the lost. We are the smell of death. To conquered enemies in chains, we can only remind them of past defeat and future punishment. Some people are so hardened, the odor of all that is Christian is odious and foul. The things of Christ become a curse rather than a blessing.

Believers have an awesome responsibility. Do our lives reveal Jesus Christ to others? Are we an aroma of life? Or are we the sentence of death? No wonder Paul would inquire, "Who is equal to such a task?"

Wrap Up

The Apostle Paul remains an example to all believers. He showed humility and courageous defense of the Christian faith. Yet the tears he shed for the people of God were both real and genuine. Paul never failed to spread the triumph Jesus secured. And, he inspired the church to carry on the work all for the Lord Jesus. Every Christian must become the fragrance of life to all around.

