



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020

2 CORINTHIANS



**LET'S GET BACK
TOGETHER**

Summary

This letter from Paul to the Corinthian church follows up a very difficult first letter which seemed to have caused some pain as well as a need to reflect. We only get to read Paul's side of the conversation, but we can see his determination to build relationships, keep pointing people to God and encourage generosity even in difficult times.

Wednesday July 8: 2 Corinthians 1-3

Can we have a hard conversation?

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

What did I like about today's reading?

The thing about all of Paul's letters is that what we are reading is just one side of a conversation and we know only snippets of what, in this case, the Corinthians are saying to Paul. What we do know from Acts 18 is that Paul (remember he was a Jew) had persuaded many Jews in Corinth that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, which had led to attacks from some other Jews.

That Paul generated so much opposition from Jews wherever he went should not surprise us because, when he arrived in a new town, he would first start preaching in the local synagogue that Jesus of Nazareth is the Jewish Messiah, and that did not go down well. (Just read Acts 13-28 - it's all about Paul and the constant theme is opposition and violence towards him.) We need to read all of Paul's letters with this in mind because the opposition that he faced from other Jews is the reason that Paul spends so much time in his letters defending himself and his reputation.

His second letter to the Corinthians starts with him doing just that in the first three chapters and, if I'm honest, it's a bit of a difficult read - there's not much to like if you read it in the context of arguments and the threats of violence towards Paul and his team. Paul's defence of his argument reaches its theological high point in 3:7-18. He uses a rabbinical debating technique called *qal va-homer*, in which he contrasts the Old Jewish Covenant administered by Moses with the New Jewish Covenant administered by Jesus. Paul is effectively saying that if the Old Covenant was true and glorious, how much more true and glorious in the New Covenant. (Jesus uses a similar rhetorical technique in Matthew 12:10-12.) If you are a Jew who doesn't accept Jesus as the Messiah, you are really going to struggle with Paul making this contrast.

The reality is that you and I are only going to appreciate the huge significance of Paul's words here if we are immersed in Jewish tradition.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

It reminds me that Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and that much of what we label as our 'Christian' heritage is thoroughly Jewish. The theological tradition of Messiah is also thoroughly Jewish and the elevation of Jesus of Nazareth to Jesus the Messiah ('Jesus Christ' in Greek) after his resurrection and ascension is rooted in Jewish theology. In the first few centuries of the Roman Empire, what we would call Christianity was thought of as a Jewish sect called the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5). Like Jesus, Paul, who was considered a ringleader of the Nazarenes, encountered opposition primarily from some Jews who did not accept Jesus as their Messiah. I wonder how you would feel about identifying yourself as a 'Nazarene' - a sect within Judaism - rather than as a 'Christian'?

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I am going to re-read Acts chapters 13 to 28 and try and understand Paul's second letter to the Corinthians in light of the fact that most of the opposition that Paul endured was from some Jews who did not accept Jesus as their Messiah.

Who am I going to share this with?

I'm going to try and spend some time with a Jewish rabbi and ask them how they view Jesus of Nazareth.

Saturday July 11: 2 Corinthians 4-7

Why should we be humble?

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

What did I like about today's reading?

I have said, during the boxset series on Paul, that, prior to encountering Jesus, he had received the best education, spoke several languages fluently, was a gifted artisan, a Roman citizen, and highly regarded Jew and, most likely, inherited family wealth. It is interesting, then, that in these chapters Paul describes himself as like a common earthenware jar of clay - probably one of the most ordinary and insignificant items you could buy - they were probably 'ten a penny', so to speak.

We know that the Corinthians had lost confidence in Paul as a leader. By this stage he was poor, he was homeless (we'd call him a sofa-surfer), under constant criticism by well-regarded public figures and in person he wasn't even particularly impressive either.

But Paul turns his apparent weaknesses upside down and argues that God's glory is all the more visible because Paul's ego is less visible. For Paul, nothing is more important than Jesus being revealed to the Corinthians and if his weaknesses allow this, then all the better! Paul recognises his job is not to be impressive but to point the Corinthians to Jesus, who is much more impressive. That's a pretty cool thing for a leader to do and reflects Paul's humility.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

It reminds me that humility is in God's nature and therefore is also part of human nature. I'm reminded of Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 2, where he says Christ Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather he made himself nothing.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

If humility is part of our human nature because we are made in God's image, then I am going to remember that every time I feel like promoting myself. I'm going to ask myself why I need to make myself look better in the eyes of other people.

Who am I going to share this with?

I'm going to share this with my colleagues at work and encourage us all to ask ourselves the same question.

Wednesday July 15: 2 Corinthians 8-9

Be thankful and generous

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

What did I like about today's reading?

I like the encouragement that Paul gives to the Corinthians to be generous. Paul is organising a huge financial gift for the church in Jerusalem from the Gentile churches that he has planted and clearly, the Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians have been really generous. But in the midst of Paul's stormy relationship with the Corinthians, they have clearly held back from being as generous as the other churches. Paul is direct in challenging them to be generous, but he appeals to the heart of the issue, wanting them to give freely rather than grudgingly.

There have been many times when other people have been generous with their time, energy and money towards me and I have always really enjoyed the experience! To receive generosity is such an uplifting experience, I do wonder why I don't go out of my way to be more generous more often! And whilst it's a blessing to be the recipient, but it's also a blessing to me when I give generously to others.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

Undoubtedly, Paul appeals to the example of Jesus (8:9) to encourage the Corinthians in generosity and of course we can see that if God is the source of all life, then everything we are and have, we have received from God.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I am going to practice the habit of thankfulness for the next 24 hours - for the less obvious things of life as well as the more obvious things that bring me joy and happiness. Like my health, my ability to work, my sight, my hearing, my toothbrush!!

I am going to remind myself to be thankful and generous at the beginning of every day by noting "be thankful and generous" in my diary.

Who am I going to share this with?

I will share this with my wife, so that we can work on it together as we share so much of our time, energy and money.

Saturday July 18: 2 Corinthians 10-13

Honestly, we should work this out

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

What did I like about today's reading?

What I like about this section of the letter is the rawness of the words, and we get an insight into the man Paul. Perhaps it's just because he has been in conflict with the Corinthians that he is anxious to make himself clear to them.

You know what it's like when you are in conflict with someone else and they don't seem to get your argument, you end up repeating yourself forcefully to try and make them understand.

I think that is what is happening here. Paul is being pretty vulnerable with his words, phrases like: "I hope you will put up with my foolishness" (11:1), "I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge" (11:6), "I am out of my mind to talk like this" (11:23); Paul is even sarcastic, "I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super apostles'" (11:5).

Clearly, the criticism of him has touched a raw nerve, especially the comparison to these 'super apostles' which Paul then refutes with a long description of his sufferings for the gospel of Jesus (11:16-12:10).

This reminds me that this is a personal letter written by Paul and although it is part of the Bible, Paul suggests that this bit is him speaking not Jesus! "In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord [Jesus] would, but as a fool" (11:17).

Paul's argument is the same as earlier in the letter, he is countering the Jewish missionaries who are insisting that the Gentiles who have given their allegiance to Jesus must also convert to Judaism. And we know that Paul is dead set against this.

As an aside, what's also interesting to note from this part of the letter is that there were clearly other representatives of the church in Jerusalem who were spreading the gospel of Jesus amongst the Gentiles, (11:4). From our perspective twenty centuries later, it can sometimes feel like Paul was solely responsible for the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

It reminds me that Paul wasn't a Victorian/Edwardian type of person who minded his 'p's and 'q's and was always on his best behaviour! Paul is really raw, vulnerable and honest about his feelings in response to the barrage of criticism he has received from the Corinthians. He's not always super nice and polite like many people think Christians should be. Come to think of it, I'm pretty sure that Jesus wasn't nice and polite with his critics - look at Matthew 23 if you don't believe me.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I'm trying to be more honest and vulnerable as a result of my faith walking process. It's hard to do, because it's risky to trust other people with my vulnerabilities, but it's so worth doing, because of the increased depth of relationship and trust that it creates.

Who am I going to share this with?

I meet weekly with two other guys involved with Severn, and I'll share this with them.