

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
August 24, 2014

Lesson Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; 7:2
Lesson Title: An Appeal for Reconciliation

Introduction

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines reconciliation as “the act of causing two people or groups to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement.” Just the mention of the word reconciliation presupposes that there is a problem that needs to be settled. The church at Corinth was not without her problems and disagreements.

Paul faced opposition from several groups within the Corinthian church. First, there was the group claiming superior spiritual knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:1-2). Second, there was the group who couldn't understand why it was sinful to fulfill sexual desires by fornication (1 Corinthians 6:9-13.) Third, a major group in the church were misusing spiritual gifts and causing confusion within and without. Paul spent three chapters attempting to deal with that problem and establish some boundaries for their immaturity and ignorance (1 Corinthians 12-14). Fourth, the Lord's Supper had turned into a drunken party (1 Corinthians 11). Fifth, some at Corinth challenged Paul's authority as an apostle and even claimed he was crazy (2 Corinthians 5:13; 10:9-10; 11:5). This was without question a situation in need of reconciliation.

Paul spoke in 2 Corinthians 5 of the reconciling activity of God and his own ministry as an ambassador of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). In chapter six, he expands upon that ministry for the benefit of the Corinthians. Paul's purpose of completing the work of winning back the Corinthians to the special relationship they once had comes through clearly in the verses of our lesson text.

An Appeal Not to Receive God's Grace in Vain (2 Corinthians 6:1-2)

Verse 1

“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”

“We then, as workers together with him” is a reference to Paul and all the apostles working “together” with God. Believers must understand that we are all working together with the Lord in regard to telling sinners how to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). “With him” is in italics meaning it is not in the original text. It should be interpreted in the same sense as 1

Corinthians 3:9, *“For we are labourers together with God...”* “Beseech” means “urge.” Paul and all the apostles urged the Corinthians not to “receive the grace of God in vain.”

“Receive” means “take by the hand.” “Vain” means “empty, meaningless.” They were not to receive the gospel in an empty or meaningless way. In the age of grace, receive grace correctly is Paul’s message. The Corinthians were recipients of God’s grace. If they now were unforgiving and division in their attitude and actions that would make God’s grace “meaningless.”

Verse 2

“(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)”

Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8, *“Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee...”* From Isaiah’s words, Paul takes two phrases, “acceptable time” and “day of salvation.” Paul added “behold” to make it more emphatic. He also used the word “accepted” and the word “now” twice to make it more intense.

Paul says Isaiah the prophet recorded for us that God said there is a certain time, a time when He listens to sinners, a time when He saves repentant sinners. And Paul says, “now” is that time. And since the time is “now,” the church doesn’t need to be at odds with God or each other.

It was absolutely essential that the Corinthians understand if some were not yet reconciled to Paul, this was the time for that. Too much was at stake for the divisions and group splits to continue.

The Conduct of Paul and the Apostles (2 Corinthians 6:3-10)

Verse 3

“Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:”

One of the greatest hindrances to the Gospel is people who profess to be Christians and their lives are bad examples. That is even worse when that person is a preacher, Sunday school teacher or church leader. Paul used his own ministry as an example to follow in verses 3-10.

He writes, “the ministry,” which enlarges his idea beyond just his personal ministry. “The ministry” Paul is speaking about involves the Corinthian Christians. “The ministry” is important because through it the gospel is carried

to the world. The spiritual condition of the local church in regard to being reconciled to one other is serious business. “The ministry” is at stake.

In verse 3 Paul describes what “the ministry” is not. The “ministry” is not to “give offence.” The word “offense” means “cause for stumbling.” The ministers and servants of God are not to cause the slightest moral or spiritual hurt in “any thing.” Our divisions, clicks, and group splits often become obstacles to the spread of the Gospel. When that happens, “the ministry” is “blamed” or, discredited. Paul doesn’t want anything to stand in the way of people being saved (1 Corinthians 10:32-33).

Don’t misunderstand what Paul is saying here. Paul does not say that he avoids offending the lost. Paul says that he and the other apostles are careful to avoid offending anyone unnecessarily and in a way that affects the Gospel, which is the heart and soul of their ministry. Paul does not and will not change the Gospel to make it more appealing to lost sinners, and he condemns anyone who does (Galatians 1:6-10). Paul wants to avoid offending men by his action and attitudes.

What Paul desires here can best be understood in his words to Titus, *“In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you”* (Titus 2:7-8).

Note: This is a good place for all of us as believers, pastors, Sunday school teachers, musicians, and church leaders to ask ourselves if our attitudes and actions help or hinder the ministry of spreading the Gospel.

Verse 4a

“But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God...”

While Paul described what the ministry is not in verse 3, he describes what the ministry should be in verses 4-10. “But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God” is the opposite of being “blamed” or “discredited.” The “all things” stresses that a child of God, especially a minister of the Gospel cannot allow exceptions for anything in his behavior or attitudes that would cause another to stumble. The servant of the Lord should be commended by his conduct in everything.

It’s a blessed thing when servants of the Lord and especially ministers of the Gospel can live the kind of life that compliments the message of Jesus Christ. In order for that to happen there is much involved.

Verse 4b-10

Paul now enumerates how an approved life is possible. He gives us his list of all the different “things” in which he must “approve” or “validate” the ministry. Notice Paul’s repeated use of the word “in” in verse 4-5, “by” in verse 6-8a, and “as” in verse 8b-10.

Verse 4b

“In much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses”

First, the “in” list in verse 4-5. The “in” list is various forms of suffering Paul experienced.

“In much patience” speaks of endurance. It’s the only one in the list that has an adjective (much) added. It relates to endurance to go through the next nine items mentioned.

“In afflictions” relates to anything that causes pressure. It is the things that weigh us down and disappoint us.

“In necessities” refers to compulsions against the will. The greatest “necessity” on Paul was to preach the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16). There was no way for him to exit that compulsion or get out of it. Life has a way of putting those things upon the servant of the Lord.

“In distresses” refers to a “strait” or a “tight place full of anxiety,” where the further one goes, the more he sees that there is no way out. As difficult as these places may be, Paul told the Romans that “distress” would never separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:35).

Verse 5

“In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;”

“In stripes” refers to wounds and blows received. According to 2 Corinthians 11:24-25, Paul received at least eight different scourgings.

“In imprisonments” refers to places where one is confined, guarded, and kept. The other apostles as well as Paul had been put in jail (Acts 4:3). This was in addition to their stripes and beatings.

“In tumults” is speaking about riots, violence, and civil disorder. Paul had already faced angry mobs at Damascus, Jerusalem, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, Ephesus already when he wrote this and there would be more (Acts 13, 14, 19, 21).

“In labours” speaks of Paul’s strenuous schedule. The word “labours” means “intense struggles united with trouble and toil.” This could include everything from his traveling to his preaching to his tent-making in order to earn a living. *(It’s sad that Paul had not yet heard the health and wealth gospel that is so predominate today or he wouldn’t have had all these troubles.)*

“In watchings” refers to sleeplessness. No one forced Paul to stay awake. It was a self-imposed discipline. It’s most likely that he was praying and preparing for ministry while others were sleeping. Some things are still worth losing sleep over!

“In fastings” refers to foodless days. Paul didn’t have to go without food but for the sake of the ministry and the gospel he did. Remember, the whole point of everything Paul is saying here is to commend himself to the gospel by enduring these things.

On the negative side, Paul had went through it all. He had battled the enemy, lived under the pressure, took the beatings, accepted the confinements, kept a rigorous schedule, stayed up and night and went without food. He endured the worst possible conditions.

Second, Paul used the word “by” in verse 6-8a. Paul’s “by” list enumerates the different means by which the gospel is proclaimed and practiced by himself and the apostles.

Verse 6

“By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,”

“By pureness” relates to Paul’s motives in all of his life and ministry. The word obviously relates to sexual purity. Paul had kept himself morally clean. But Paul was also clean in his thought life and life in general.

“By knowledge” is referring to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Paul told the Colossians, *“In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2:3). The Christian life and ministry is about knowing Jesus Christ. “Knowledge” concerning Jesus Christ is offered to sinners and is available to every believer.

“By longsuffering” refers to the patience Paul had in regard to the Corinthians. Some of the Corinthian Christians had brought charges against Paul and imposed some injustices on him and his fellow workers. This called for much patience and longsuffering on his part.

“By kindness” means Paul related to the Corinthians with integrity of character. Both “longsuffering” and “kindness” are expressions of Christian love (Galatians 5:22).

“By the Holy Ghost” is listed here by Paul to indicate that He is the source of all these virtues and Christian graces. Everything Paul has listed is a result of the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts He bestows. Could this be a reminder that the Christian life is not about humans trying to be better humans in relation to one another? The Christian life can only be lived through the power of the Holy Spirit.

“By love unfeigned” means Paul ministered by “unmasked, genuine” love. Genuine love for each other is not to be hypocritical or pretentious. “Love” is the first mentioned after the “Holy Ghost” because “love” is the primary fruit of the Spirit.

Verse 7

“By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,”

“By the word of truth” speaks of Paul giving the Corinthians God’s Word based on his love for them. Paul’s message to them was sincere and truthful. Whether Paul wrote to them in a letter or whether he was with them in person, he spoke “truth.”

“By the power of God” is the bottom line of Paul’s ministry. “Power” is the Greek word *dunamis*, “God’s strength and God’s ability.” Paul is not out there preaching and writing letters in his own strength. Paul isn’t depending upon his power of persuasiveness to change lives.

“By the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” means Paul was ready for attack from any angle. Paul wasn’t looking for conflicts and problems but he wanted the Corinthians to know he was ready should they come. His ministry was carried out through the “weapons” of spiritual warfare (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Verse 8a

“By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report:”

“By honour and dishonour” means “amid the good and the bad.” The Christian life and especially Christian ministry is daily exposed to the shallow judgments of the world. Those judgments range from silly flippant comments to outright intentional insults. Paul faced them all.

“By evil report and good report” obviously refers to the conclusions people had made about Paul and his ministry. There were many people who supported Paul’s ministry but there were also people who sought to destroy it. Nothing has changed! The “evil reports” and the “good reports” will come, but the minister of Christ must “*give not offence in any thing*” (v.3).

Third, Paul used the word “as” and “yet” in verses 8b-10. His “as” and “yet” list describes how unbelievers see the apostles but how he and his fellow workers really stand with Christ.

Verse 8b-9

“As deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

“As deceivers, and yet true.” Paul was being accused of being a false apostle which meant he was a “deceiver.” A “deceiver” is one who misleads into error. It is strange that anyone could view Paul in this way. In contrast to how some viewed Paul, he was “yet true.” Paul was real and so was his ministry.

“As unknown, and yet well known” means Paul was labeled as a “nobody.” Some would not recognize Paul as an apostle. Paul was certainly recognized when he was persecuting Christians before he was saved but now he is not recognized as an apostle. Strange! Although unrecognized by his enemies, he is “yet well known.” In other words, “God knew him!”

“As dying, and behold, we live” is a possible reference to the many illnesses and situations Paul had faced that no doubt produced rumors of his death. Many Jewish leaders would have been glad if Paul had died. “Behold, we live” are three words you just rejoice in when you read. Can’t you hear Paul say, “You thought I was gone, well, here I am?” God’s servant is invincible until the Lord is finished with him.

“As chastened, and not killed.” “Chastened” means “punished.” The suffering Paul had faced was punishment to him mentally and physically. And yet, he was “not killed.” The word “killed” means “rendered extinct, destroyed.”

Verse 10

“As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”

“As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” lets us see deeply into the heart of Paul. The true minister of the gospel is never immune to sorrows and disappointments. He must have felt a deep anxiety for the Corinthian church as all ministers do if they love the people they pastor. Although he experienced

that sorrow, he “always rejoiced.” His rejoicing was in Christ, not the circumstances. Paul’s joy was deeper than the circumstances, thus the use of the word “always.”

“As poor, yet making many rich.” Paul’s financial situation was to be pitied. He worked to support himself and his ministry. Ministry has become a profitable business today much to the harm of the gospel. Ministers are to be financially supported (Luke 10:7; 1 Corinthians 9:5, 14; 1 Timothy 5:17), but they are not to use their ministry for unjust gain. Although Paul was “poor” financially, he was able to make “many rich.”

The phrase “making many rich” is not referring to financial wealth. It is referring to the unsearchable riches in Christ Jesus. Through his preaching and ministry, Paul was able to help sinners and saints come to know the eternal value of Jesus Christ.

“As having nothing, and yet possessing all things” is possibly the greatest aspect of Paul’s ministry mentioned in this list. The greatest asset a minister can have is freedom from “things.” To the natural eye of those who looked at Paul, he appeared to have “nothing.” Paul had no title deeds to land or possessions, and yet, he had everything! Since God owned it all, and since Paul belonged to God, he had access to all that God has.

An Appeal to Be Fully Reconciled to Paul (2 Corinthians 6:11-13)

Verse 11

“O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.”

“Our mouth is open unto you” means Paul is not keeping anything back from them. Although Paul had spoken things which were very private, he had still revealed his inner most thoughts to the Corinthians. Paul’s speech had been straightforward.

“Our heart is opened wide” stresses the thought that Paul’s heart is still open. After the letters and the challenge to his integrity and apostleship, his “heart” is “enlarged” and desirous of reconciliation. “Enlarged” means “broad, wide enough to embrace.” In spite of everything that has happened in their strained relationship, Paul still has room in his heart for the Corinthians.

Verse 12

“Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels.”

“Straitened” means “narrow, cramped and reduced.” The relationship between Paul and the Corinthians was not “cramped” because of Paul. It was “cramped”

and “reduced” on their part. Any strain in their relationship had come from the Corinthians who had falsely accused Paul. This “cramping” and “narrowing” of their relationship existed in their “bowels.” The word “bowels” refers to the “seat of passion” within man. What the Corinthian’s were feeling towards Paul didn’t originate with him, it came from within the Corinthians.

Verse 13

“Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.”

“Now for a recompense in the same” means “in the way that my heart was enlarged or open toward you,” be that way toward me! Paul pleaded for the Corinthians to open their heart to his as wide as he had opened his heart to the. “I speak as unto my children” means this plea for reconciliation is coming to the Corinthians in the same way a father would plea to a child. With his heart opened and his arms extended like a father waiting for his child to come jump up in his arms, Paul was saying, “Come back!”

Paul’s Appeal for Affection (2 Corinthians 7:2)

Verse 2

“Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.”

“Receive” means “make room, leave enough space.” Paul’s plea here connects with 2 Corinthians 6:14, “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...*” If the Corinthian’s were all yoked up and hooked up with those false teachers and troublemakers there would be no room for reconciliation when Paul moved toward them in love.

“We wronged no man...we have corrupted no man...we have defrauded no man.” Here is a threefold denial of wrongdoing. Some scholars believe Paul used these three specific statements to deny three specific charges that had been leveled against him. Whether or not that is the case the fact remains that Paul’s conduct had been blameless.

“Wronged” means “unjustly or wickedly. “Corrupted” carries the idea of wrongdoing for the sake of financial gain. “Defrauded” means “actions intended to get the best of others or to have a significant advantage over. Paul never used people to gain an advantage. He never treated anyone in an evil way. What Paul is declaring here should be said about every minister and preacher of the gospel.

Conclusion

With all the problems Paul faced in Corinth, how can he be so positive? How can he be as optimistic for reconciliation as his words in our lesson text indicate? How can Paul be so encouraged about the Corinthians and so confident about them, so much so that he boasts of them to others? What enables Paul to think and write with such confidence when so many wrongs have been committed against the ministry and against him?

Part of the answer is in the fact that Paul never forgot that he had been given this ministry through the mercy of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). Another part of the answer is that while the Corinthians distanced themselves from Paul and the other apostles, he never distanced himself from them. But the greatest reason Paul remained optimistic toward reconciliation is that he has done what the Lord asked him to do. He confronted the wrong at Corinthian in love with a desire toward reconciliation. And as painful as all of it was, Paul knew that if the Corinthians would respond biblically, the end would be reconciliation and joy.

Amen.