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Week Seven

Week Eight

## By What Standard?

The introduction to the series on 2 Corinthians has the title, “By What Standard?” because the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian congregation represents a clash of worldviews. Part of our problem in reading the bible is that our own culture has been so influenced by its teaching that we fail to hear that the lives and ministry of early Christians were seen as subversive and counter-cultural.

Let me give you one general example... Mercy was not considered one of the virtues of the noble person in the Roman world. It was, rather, a weakness. The noble's spirit was untouched by appeals to mercy. People got what they deserved. Justice was the appropriate virtue nobility should pursue. It was only in the second century AD that the increasing influence of the gospel of Jesus Christ—the declaration of a God who is rich in mercy—that people begin to develop an idea of mercy as a virtue.

In our own culture mercy is a virtue, however it is one that is increasingly only given lip-service to, where litigation sets the standard of how we relate to others with whom we have issues.

The Roman Seneca said of the Jewish faith that unlike the Roman religions its doctrines and practices had historical justifications. Over and against the mythology of paganism was the historical detail—the events—of Exodus and exile that gave shape and justification to the Jewish practices.

This historical quality is also part of the fabric of Christian belief, and yet it is one that we often don't take much notice of. For history tends to be something we assume and use to defend the validity of our Christian beliefs, but we don't deal in the detail of our reading of our scriptures. We generally approach the scriptures in an attempt to look for abiding principles by which to live our lives. But in doing this we will often fail to understand how radical the gospel message is.

What we want to do in all bible study is to listen to what God is saying in this scripture. But, to do that properly we need to place it within its own context and develop a sense of the historical situation that is being addressed so we are able to more accurately apply it to our own day. Being specific rather than general about Paul's day will help us to be specific in our own day in regards to application.

So, knowing about the background of Corinth and the sort of society that it was is not just the sort of thing you should do, but it could possibly fundamentally help you to understand what is going on in the passage.

### Background to Corinth

Corinth was an old Greek city that had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC and rebuilt by Julius Caesar a hundred years later, as a Roman colony. This new city not only attracted Roman veterans, but Greeks, Syrians and Jews.

Geographically, Corinth stood on the isthmus of Corinth, a narrow neck of land connecting mainland Greece with the southern peninsula (the Peloponnesus), between the Aegean and Adriatic seas. It was in a brilliant position for trade. Sailors used to haul their boats over land at the narrow neck to cut out the long and dangerous sea voyage south—the present Corinthian canal does a much better job. It was a significant trade town, not only because it was a short cut for sailors, but if you traveled the north/south route by land you had to go through Corinth.

It was also known for its sport and arts. Every two years the “Isthmian Games” were held in Corinth and attracted competitors and spectators alike. It is also noted for its bronze work made according to a secret formula. It had the property of being very shiny. One of the doors to the Temple was made of Corinthian bronze. Alongside great wealth and luxury there was poverty and great need in Corinth.

As a consequence of all this, Corinth was a rich, multi-cultural and multi-national city. Corinth was dominated by the ‘Acro-corinth’ (this is similar to the Acro-Polis at Athens) —a high mountain which served both as a place for temples and as a defensive position. Aphrodite was not the only god or goddess worshipped—like Athens, Corinth was full of religion.

Temple prostitutes and a large ‘floating’ population helped to give Corinth a very bad name for all kinds of immoral behavior. An immoral person in the ancient world was said to be ‘playing the Corinthian’.

Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months, on his second missionary journey. During that time he founded a church to which he later wrote at least two letters now in the New Testament (1 and 2 Corinthians).



## Week Three

## Week Four

## Prayer Points

Week One

Week Two

## Study One

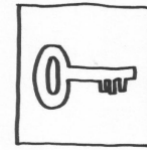
2 Corinthians 1.1-11

### A Comfortable Lifestyle



#### **Seed Question**

How do you respond to times of suffering?



#### **Key Verse**

2 Corinthians 1.3,4— "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.



#### **Big Idea**

Paul's ministry is one of suffering rather than glory, yet in the present he has a confident hope because of the God of all comfort.

#### **Background**

Read Acts 19 as background to some of the sufferings Paul refers to in this letter.

1. How do you think you would cope with living the way Paul did?

2. Read v1-2. What is the common thread that holds the greeting together—who Paul is, who the church is and what the greeting is about?

Background to the Corinthian Crisis

Paul is writing to the Corinthians at a time when other so called “super-apostles” are trying to establish themselves. They are very different to Paul.

3. From the verses below, describe the implied attitudes of the “super-apostles”.

2 Cor 3.1—

2 Cor 11.5-6—

2 Cor 12.11-13—

4. How would the attitude of the “super-apostles” resonate with the cultural background of Corinth?

**Comfort and Suffering—vv3-7**

5. Below, using arrows and labels, describe the direction of comfort in suffering.

God/Christ

Paul

Corinthians

6. What do you think are the sufferings of Christ? (v5)

17. How can we “excel in the grace of giving”? What stops us from excelling at this?

18. How do you know when you’re being generous, and when you’re not?



**Points for Prayer**

19. Write prayer points to use this week from the passage about your life.



**Journal Reflection**

20. Think about God’s generosity and come up with three illustrations of that generosity... For example, standing under a waterfall to get a glass of water to drink

7. What was Paul able to do as a result of his own sufferings? (v6)

**Paul’s Sufferings—vv8-11**

8. Write in the table below the suffering words or phrases and the comfort words or phrases.

Suffering Words or Phrases	Comfort words or Phrases

9. How is Paul’s experience the experience of Jesus and the experience of the gospel?

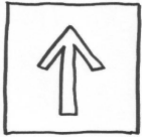


**Points to Ponder**

10. What is your expectation of the Christian life in regard to what God is going to bring in your life?

11. What are your assumptions about the lives of Christians who minister to you?

12. If we hide the points of difficulty in our lives from each other, what do we cheat each other of?



**Points for Prayer**

13. Write prayer points to use this week from the passage about your life.



**Journal Reflection**

A journal reflection is wrestling with a question that arises from the study and encourages you to reflect about your life in Christ. Just as we've given you space to write your thoughts, you need to give yourself some space to write them...

14. How do your fears insulate you from the difficult task of following Jesus?

9. In 8.16-24, what principles of integrity does Paul insist on? What application might they have to our church?

10. In 9.1-15, who should determine what each person should give?

11. How does this differ from the Old Testament system of giving a tenth?

12 Why is it wrong to give reluctantly, or under compulsion?

13. In 9.8 there is a good definition of the blessing that comes from generous giving. What is it that will abound to the cheerful giver (see also 9.9-11)?

14. What are the results of generous giving that Paul describes in 9.12-14?



**Points to Ponder**

15. Have you ever considered it a privilege to give?

16. How do you think the principle of generosity should affect what we do as a church?



**Giving Some Thoughts on Giving—8.1-9.15**

Paul uses the example of the Macedonians as an encouragement for the Corinthians in the area of giving.

2. Try this bit of Macedonian mathematics:

Severe Trial + Overflowing Joy + Extreme Poverty =

3. What does Paul say the Macedonians did in 8.3-4?

4. In 8.5, there is a fundamental principle of Christian giving. What is it and why is it so important?

5. What does Paul urge the Corinthians to do in 8.7? What does he mean?

6. What "grace" should motivate us in this (8.9)? How did we "become rich" through Christ's poverty?

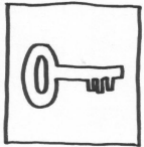
7. The Corinthians were always good starters, but apparently not such great finishers. What does Paul urge them to do in 8.10-12? Why?

8. What principles can we draw from 8.13-15? Can we do better at relieving the needs of those in the church who have little?

## Tough Love

**Seed Question**

Describe any positive experience of being corrected by another Christian.

**Key Verse**

2 Corinthians 1.12— “Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace.

**Big Idea**

Ministry to others has at its core an absolute commitment to their best. This does not always mean that the task is enjoyable for either person, but the aim is always godly wholeness.

**Background**

The Corinthians seem to have been complaining that Paul, instead of visiting them, had written a letter with lots of tough words. It appears to be a letter we don’t have—read 2 Corinthians 7.5-13.

**Paul’s Change of Plans—1.12-2.4****Paul’s Boast—A Ministry from God—1.12-14**

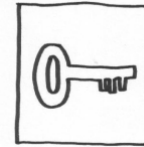
For Paul, circumstances could alter plans, but one thing that was consistent throughout the changing circumstances was the aim of Paul’s ministry for the Corinthians.

1. What is the shape of that ministry that Paul “boasts” about?

## Cultivating the Attitude of Gratitude

**Seed Question**

Do you have to be rich to be generous? Explain.

**Key Verse**

2 Corinthians 8.9— “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

**Big Idea**

Just as every act for the Christian is a mirroring of God’s action towards us, so Paul encourages the Corinthians to be generous in their collection for the Christians in Jerusalem.

**Background**

What is going on behind the scene of these collections is what I believe Paul would have considered the icing on the cake of his ministry. The collection is for the Jewish church in Jerusalem—the saints. The Gentile churches, including the Corinthians, collected money from their churches over a long period of time. Particular men were entrusted to bring the collection from the Gentile world to Jerusalem.

What this symbolised for Paul was a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. It was an indication of the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Old Testament prophecy had foretold the time when Israel was dead (Exile) and had been raised to life again (Return)—Ezekiel 37—, that God would bring the nations and their riches to Jerusalem. I believe the collection in a sense represented a provocative statement by Paul that in Jesus Israel’s hopes had been fulfilled.

1. Why is Paul seeking to collect money from the Greek churches—Romans 15.25-27?

2. In Paul's description of his ministry he seems to be drawing a difference between how he operates and how others operate. Where is this apparent in the passage?

Did Paul's Ministry Lack Direction—1.15-22

Part of the problem with reading Paul's letters is that we always have to read between the lines—we only know one half of the situation and have to guess what was going on at Corinth.

3. Read vv15-17 and suggest how those who opposed Paul seem to have interpreted his non-visit in an unflattering way.

4. Read vv18-22. How does Paul answer his critics?

5. How has God shown his faithfulness to his promises?

The Reason for a Change in Plan—1.23-2.4

In this section Paul explains why he changed his plans and what his motivation was.

6. Summarise his reasons.

**Dealing With the Sinner—2.5-11**

7. How is Paul's aim in ministry demonstrated in dealing with the sinner?

8. How has Paul's treatment in regard to the sinner paralleled his treatment of the Corinthians?



**Points to Ponder**

9. Correcting people is always a difficult relational exercise. What dangers are there for the one doing the correction?

10. What dangers are there for the one who is being corrected?

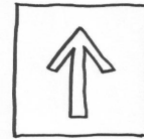
11. What dangers are there for the church?



**Points for Prayer**

12. Write prayer points to use this week from the passage about your life.

11. What process would you want somebody to go through before they corrected you?



**Points for Prayer**

12. Write prayer points to use this week from the passage about your life.



**Journal Reflection**

13. Reflect on an incident in your life where you experienced worldly sorrow and one where you experienced godly sorrow. What has differed in the two experiences?

4. How did Paul respond to the news?

**The Stinging Letter—v8-16**

5. Paul has obviously written a letter where hard things needed to be said. Why didn't Paul regret writing the letter?

6. Why did he regret writing it?

7. In v10, Paul says that godly sorrow brings repentance and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. Reflect on Peter's response to denying Jesus, and Judas' response to betraying Jesus as examples of this principles.

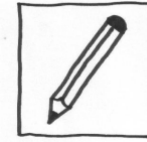
8. What was Paul's ultimate reason for writing the letter—v12?



**Points to Ponder**

9. What stops us from welcoming correction?

10. How would we like somebody to correct us well?



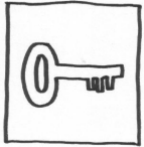
**Journal Reflection**

13. I avoid correction because...

## Nothing To Hide

**Seed Question**

How accurate is the statement: "Christian ministry, as the Christian life, is all about in whom you place your confidence: yourself or God"?

**Key Verse**

2 Corinthians 3.5-6— "Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

**Big Idea**

Proclaiming the gospel of Christ simply might look unimpressive, but it has a glory beyond not only the old covenant, but anything the world can offer, because through the gospel, captives are released, forgiveness is given and God's Spirit is received.

**You Can't Judge a Book by Its Cover—2.12-3.6**

1. How might Paul's speedy departure from Troas be interpreted?

The Corinthians may well accuse Paul of an inconsistent and fickle ministry, but those who made this judgment were not seeing the whole story. In vv14-17 Paul describes the reality that is not seen by the world.

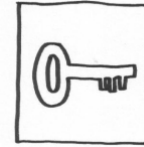
Paul is led in a triumphal procession—victorious Roman generals were granted triumphal processions where, with the prisoners, fragrant incense was also burnt. The smell of the incense is relative.

2. What would the aroma of the incense indicate for the Roman populace and what would the aroma of the incense indicate for the prisoners?

## Heartfelt Change

**Seed Question**

If learning from our mistakes is so good, why do we hate having our mistakes pointed out to us?

**Key Verse**

2 Corinthians 7.10— "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."

**Big Idea**

Paul, the pastor, is prepared to inflict sorrow upon the Corinthians if, in the end, it yields a spiritual benefit to them.

**I'm On Your Side—vv2-4**

In vv2-4, Paul seems to be going to great lengths to convince the Corinthians that he is on their side so they should trust him.

1. How does Paul do this?

**The Corinthians—God's Comfort to Paul—vv5-7**

2. When Paul is hard-pressed, how does God comfort him?

3. What was it about the Corinthians that comforted Paul?

3. How does this help us understand Paul's ministry?

Paul is masterful in preparing the ground for future issues in his letters. In 3.1-6, he is implying a distinction between himself and the "super-apostles" in terms of their credentials.

4. What are the differences?

5. How does Paul describe the Corinthians as his letter of God's commendation?

6. Paul wants to make a difference between those who commend themselves and himself. How does he do this in 3.4-6?

Read this passage from Ezekiel 36.26-27

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

This passage describes how God needed to do something different in the life of Israel and in the life of all human beings. This, says Paul, is occurring in his ministry.

**An Unfading Glory—3.7-18**

Read Exodus 34.29-35. The questions in 3.7-9 were probably being asked by Paul's opponents.

7. What are they implying about Paul's ministry?

8. In 3.10-11, what does Paul say about the glory we have through the ministry of the gospel compared to the ministry of Moses?

9. Read 3.12-16. How does Paul demonstrate the boldness that comes from knowing his ministry brings an unfading glory?

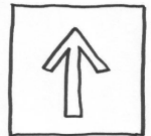
10. Read 3.17-18. What does turning to Jesus produce in a person?



**Points to Ponder**

11. How accurate is it to say that peddlers of religion are confidence tricksters?

12. What lies at the heart of Paul's ministry?



**Points for Prayer**

13. Write prayer points to use this week from the passage about your life.

**Magnificent Motives— 7.1-4**

7. In v1, Paul outlines the goal of his ministry for the Corinthians. What are they?

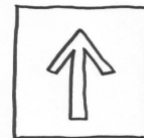
8. In v2-4, he describes his motives. What are they?



**Points to Ponder**

9. How might we encourage each other to make “proclaiming Christ” a greater priority?

10. If Paul is talking about not being yoked with the false apostles in the Corinthian context, how much application does this have to us today?



**Points for Prayer**

11. Write prayer points to use this week from the passage about your life.



**Journal Reflection**

12. Describe the process that God used to make you one of his children and thank him for the people who were involved.



Tough Times	Spiritual Fruit	Opposite Extremes	And Yet...
Troubles	Endurance	Glory and dishonour	Genuine, yet regarded as impostors
Hardships	Purity		Known, yet regarded as unknown



**Journal Reflection**

14. Paul has described Christian maturity as the glory of Christ-likeness, not self-confidence. Reflect on where these two different definitions of maturity work in your own life...

3. Paul is writing this letter because there is a problem. In vv11-13, he states it in a very moving way. What are the Corinthians doing?

4. What does Paul ask of them?

**Yoked With Unbelievers—6.14-18**

5. What word picture is Paul using when he talks about being “unequally yoked”?

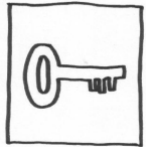
6. These verses have lots of applications. In the context, who do you think Paul might be talking about in vv14-15? (Skip forward to 2 Cor 11 if you need some ideas—especially vv13-15.)

**Paul's Marketing of the Gospel**



**Seed Question**

How do you feel when you are sharing with someone else the message of Jesus?



**Key Verse**

2 Corinthians 4.7— "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."



**Big Idea**

Christ's servants might look weak and unimpressive but that's because they are; it is Christ himself who is glorious—He is the treasure in the cracked pots of our lives.

**Background**

For a people who are culturally biased towards outward appearance, verbal dexterity and public acclaim, a Christ-like ministry took a fair bit of getting used to. Paul continues to wrestle with these worldly assumptions in his relationship with the Corinthians.

**Let's Not Talk About Me—vv1-6**

1. How does Paul describe the reason why God has given him the ministry of proclaiming Christ?

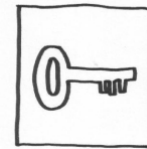
Mercy was not seen as a virtue in the ancient world, but as a weakness. We need to hear this first verse as profoundly counter-cultural. Those who are the "super-apostles" not only blow their own horn—they have a whole orchestra.

**Matters of the Heart**



**Seed Question**

What would you be prepared to suffer for your faith in Christ? What do you suffer?



**Key Verse**

2 Corinthians 6.14— "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"



**Big Idea**

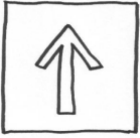
Paul's ministry is one of suffering and hardship (being Christlike), which is proof he is a true apostle—believers must not follow false leaders.

**You Must Be Crazy—6.3-13**

Paul uses a fair degree of irony in parts of his letters to the Corinthians. In some ways v3 needs to be taken as ironic, but with a very sharp pointy end. Paul commends himself in v4 in ways that would appear like stumbling blocks to the proud, prestige-hungry Corinthians. Paul lists things that they would consider discreditable.

1. Why do you think Paul is so concerned that his ministry "not be discredited"—v3?

2. In vv4-10, Paul lists off a string of things that he says "commend his ministry". It's a strange mixture, at first jumping between personal hardships and personal qualities, then between extremes of glory and dishonour. Try to complete the table on the following page... there are a few examples to start you off...



**Points for Prayer**

13. Write prayer points to use this week from the passage about your life.



**Journal Reflection**

14. Choose a non-Christian friend and describe to them why you want them to trust in Jesus...

2. In the table below, identify the dos and don'ts of Paul's ministry—v2.

Paul's Dos	Paul's Don'ts

3. Why can't some people see the true glory of the gospel—v3-4?

4. Why do others see glory in the message of Christ—v6?

5. How does Paul describe himself and Jesus in v5?

**A Tale of Two Stories—vv7-12**

6. In v7, Paul gives the reason why the gospel of God and God's true ministers look weak. What is the reason?

7. Paul then gives his experience as ministry as a reality of this pattern. In the table below pair those things that express Paul's weakness with how God meets that weakness.

Paul's Weakness	How God Meets It

**Fixing Our Eyes on What is Unseen—vv13-18**

In vv15-18, Paul is saying that the gospel message is more than just something to tell—it shapes the life of a believer in a Christlike way.

8. How are the message, the messenger and the means of proclaiming the message all related?

9. What keeps Paul going—vv17,18?

4. What response should there be to this message—v15?

5. What is the result of accepting Christ's death for us—v17? What does this mean?

6. Who has done all this—v18?

7. What does reconciliation mean? How has God reconciled us to himself through Christ?

8. If God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them, why will some people still face condemnation?

9. What does Paul urge people to do?

10. How is it that a just God can not count our sin against us—v21?



**Points to Ponder**

11. In 6.1-2, Paul is urging the Corinthians to consider themselves as fellow workers with God, that this is the day of salvation. Do you consider yourself to be an ambassador of Christ offering amnesty in this present age?

12. What stops you from acting as an effective ambassador?

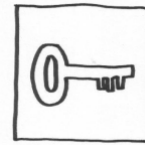


## God's Ambassador



### Seed Question

Do you really believe there is a hell to avoid and a heaven to enjoy?



### Key Verse

2 Corinthians 5.14— "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.



### Big Idea

For Paul, knowing the plan of God in Christ carries with it the burden and privilege of announcing that now is the time of God's amnesty in Christ.

### A Story

Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD by Roman troops, but prior to its capture it was given an opportunity to accept an offer of peace. The offer was made through a Jew called Josephus. Josephus had been captured in Galilee and had surrendered and made peace with the future emperor of the Empire, the Roman general Vespasian. Josephus was an ambassador and urged the residents of Jerusalem to lay down their arms and to accept the justice of Rome. We know that in the end, some tried to accept the terms of peace and were killed by the defenders of Jerusalem, and ultimately the degradation and suffering of those who would not accept peace became a byword.

1. Read 5.11-6.2 and list the similarities and contrasts between the ministry of Josephus and the ministry of Paul.

Use the table over the page...



4. What is the Spirit's role in this process?

**Home is Where the Heart Is—vv6-10**

5. In v7, Paul gives two alternate ways of perceiving reality. What are they and what do they symbolise as approaches to life?

6. How would a person who approaches life by sight assess somebody who lives by faith?

7. For Paul, living by faith is a matter of confidence—v6,7. How does this confidence demonstrate itself—v8,9?

The time of the resurrection is also the time of the judgment. Paul's confidence in what is coming leads him to please Jesus.

8. Why is this the case?

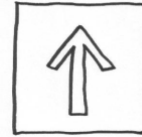


**Points to Ponder**

9. "Most people in our affluent western society spend most of their time, energy and money trying to create their own little heaven on earth. Sometimes, only the arrival of death reminds them that they have failed." Is this true of us?

10. How can we balance a proper respect for the present world and our life here with the longing for the life to come?

11. What does the prospect of having to give an account to your loving Lord make you want to do?



**Points for Prayer**

12. Write prayer points to use this week from the passage about your life.



**Journal Reflection**

13. Write a letter expressing to the Lord Jesus your longing to be with him...