

ADULT BIBLE STUDY IN SIMPLIFIED ENGLISH

STUDY GUIDE

Strong Words for Wise Living 1st & 2nd Corinthians

WRITERS

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Adult Bible Study in Simplified English Study Guide

Strong Words for Wise Living

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Strong Words for Wise Living

Introduction

Parents teach. Leaders teach. Bosses teach. Coaches teach. And, of course, teachers teach. *What* they teach depends on what they are good at. But at some time, they all teach people how to make good choices in life.

Paul had to teach “strong words for wise living” to the believers at a church in Greece in about 50 A.D. The church was in Corinth, a very large city. There were temples to false gods, sex for sale, and much more. This city was well known for being full of sin.

A little group of Christians lived in the middle of all that sin. Paul started a church in Corinth on one of his missionary trips. Each new believer chose to follow the one true God. But it was hard to live a Christian life in such a sinful city. Sometimes, they made bad choices. Sometimes, their old lifestyle got in the way of their new Christian lifestyle.

Paul moved around a lot, starting churches everywhere he went. He wrote letters back to the churches to help them with their problems. We have two of his letters to the Corinthian church. These letters talk honestly about the problems they were facing.

Paul gave them strong words about how they should live. He wrote about giving,

relationships, marriage, spiritual gifts, church problems, and more. But what we remember most is what he wrote about love in his first letter (see 1 Corinthians 13). Many weddings have used words from this chapter.

Most of all, Paul wanted them to know that no matter what their troubles were, God’s grace would always be there (see 2 Corinthians 12:9). We can trust this to be true as well. No matter what we face, God’s grace gives us strength in hard times. These are strong words to help us to live wisely!

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Janet Roberts wrote lessons 1-2. She has taught ESL since 1976, trains teachers, and teaches English in other countries. She also directs a volunteer ESL program.

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Judy Hughes wrote lessons 5-7. Judy has taught English to internationals in the U.S. and abroad for many years. She and her husband serve ministers through their Shepherd's Rest Ministry.

Jennifer Carson wrote lessons 8-13. Jennifer is Baylor University graduate, a former English teacher, a freelance writer/editor, and a long-time writer for this series.

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson Overview

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Strong Words for Wise Living

Word List

Lesson 1

criminals: people who do wrong or illegal things, like killing and stealing. They are put in jail if they are caught by police.

illegal: not legal or right because there is a law against it. Those who do something illegal will be punished if they are caught.

Lesson 2

eternity: forever; time with no beginning or ending

foundation: the very bottom or first level of a building that supports the building from underneath

Lesson 3

discipline: punishing sinful actions to encourage change for the good

puffed-up: thinking too highly of oneself

tough love: love expressed in a hard way especially to encourage better actions

Lesson 4

conscience: the part of the mind that makes you know your actions are right or wrong and tells you to do right or good.

sacrifice: (verb) the act of giving something to a god (idol) in worship

stumbling block: Something done by one believer which may be copied by another believer. The Bible does not say the action is wrong. But for the second believer, it feels like sin, and doing it could make his faith weaker.

Lesson 5

discern: to come to know, recognize, or understand

instruments: tools used to make music

melody: the main part of a song

orchestra: a group of people who play music together and are led by a leader called a conductor

Lesson 6

boast: to talk with pride about something good we have done

jealous: feeling or showing an unhappy or angry desire to have what someone else has

negative: focused on the bad qualities of someone or something

Strong Words for Wise Living

Word List

Lesson 7

harvest: the crop that is gathered

proof: something that shows what is true or correct

witness: someone who sees something happen and tells about it

suddenly: very quickly and usually in an unexpected way

Lesson 8

authority: a quality that makes something true or real

firm: not weak or uncertain

forsake: to give up or leave entirely; abandon

Lesson 9

clashed: to be in a situation in which you are fighting or disagreeing; to come into conflict with someone

humble: not proud or thinking of yourself as better than others

mature: fully grown or fully developed; like an adult

pride: a feeling that you are more important or better than other people

Lesson 10

ignore: to act like you do not see or hear someone or something

overwhelm: to cause someone to have too many things to deal with

surrender: to agree to stop fighting or working because you know you will not succeed

Lesson 11

conflict: a strong disagreement or angry argument

harsh: unpleasant or difficult to experience

restored: to put back together something that is broken; to make new again

revenge: the act of hurting someone because they hurt you first

Lesson 12

confronted: opposed or challenged in a direct or forceful way

criticism: negative words that express judgment and disapproval

philosopher: someone who studies about knowledge, truth, and the meaning of life

Lesson 13

boast: to show too much pride in yourself or in something you have done

culture: the way a group of people lives and thinks

impress: to cause someone to admire you

Strong Words for Wise Living

Word List in Alphabetical Order

These vocabulary words can found in the lesson number listed in each definition. For example, “L8” means Lesson 8.

authority: a quality that makes something true or real (L8)

boast: to talk with pride about something good we have done (L6); to show too much pride in yourself or in something you have done (L13)

clashed: to be in a situation in which you are fighting or disagreeing; to come into conflict with someone (L9)

conflict: a strong disagreement or angry argument (L11)

confronted: opposed or challenged in a direct or forceful way (L12)

conscience: the part of the mind that makes you know your actions are right or wrong and tells you to do right or good (L4)

criminals: people who do wrong or illegal things, like killing and stealing. They are put in jail if they are caught by police. (L1)

criticism: negative words that express judgment and disapproval (L12)

culture: the way a group of people lives and thinks (L13)

discern: to come to know, recognize, or understand (L5)

discipline: punishing sinful actions to encourage change for the good (L3)

eternity: forever; time with no beginning or ending (L2)

firm: not weak or uncertain (L8)

forsake: to give up or leave entirely; abandon (L8)

foundation: the very bottom or first level of a building that supports the building from underneath (L2)

harsh: unpleasant or difficult to experience (L11)

harvest: the crop that is gathered (L7)

humble: not proud or thinking of yourself as better than others (L9)

ignore: to act like you do not see or hear someone or something (L10)

illegal: not legal or right because there is a law against it. Those who do something illegal

will be punished if they are caught. (L1)

impress: to cause someone to admire you (L13)

instruments: tools used to make music (L5)

jealous: feeling or showing an unhappy or angry desire to have what someone else has (L6)

melody: the main part of a song (L5)

mature: fully grown or fully developed; like an adult (L9)

negative: focused on the bad qualities of someone or something (L6)

orchestra: a group of people who play music together and are led by a leader called a conductor (L5)

overwhelm: to cause someone to have too many things to deal with (L10)

philosopher: someone who studies about knowledge, truth, and the meaning of life (L12)

pride: a feeling that you are more important or better than other people (L9)

proof: something that shows what is true or correct (L7)

Puffed-up: thinking too highly of oneself (L3)

restored: to put back together something that is broken; to make new again (L11)

revenge: the act of hurting someone because they hurt you first (L11)

sacrifice: (verb) the act of giving something to a god (idol) in worship (L4)

stumbling block: Something done by one believer which may be copied by another believer. The Bible does not say the action is wrong. But for the second believer, it feels like sin, and doing it could make his faith weaker. (L4)

suddenly: very quickly and usually in an unexpected way (L7)

surrender: to agree to stop fighting or working because you know you will not succeed (L10)

tough love: love expressed in a hard way especially to encourage better actions (L3)

witness: someone who sees something happen and tells about it (L7)

Strong Words for Wise Living

Memory Verses

Lesson 1

“But God has chosen what the world calls foolish to shame the wise. He has chosen what the world calls weak to shame what is strong.”
(1 Corinthians 1:27)

Lesson 2

“Jesus Christ is the Stone on which other stones for the building must be laid. It can be only Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Lesson 3

“We know that our old life, our old sinful self, was nailed to the cross with Christ. And so the power of sin that held us was destroyed. Sin is no longer our boss.” (Romans 6:6)

Lesson 4

“Since you are free to do as you please, be careful that this does not hurt a weak Christian.” (1 Corinthians 8:9)

Lesson 5

“You are all part of the body of Christ.”
(1 Corinthians 12:27)

Lesson 6

“And now we have these three: faith and hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.”
(1 Corinthians 3:13)

Lesson 7

“He will take away death for all time. The Lord God will dry tears from all faces. He will take away the shame of His people from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 25:8)

Lesson 8

“He gives us comfort in all our troubles...We give the same kind of comfort God gives us.”
(2 Corinthians 1:4)

Lesson 9

“...but we are to hold to the truth with love in our hearts. We are to grow up and be more like Christ. He is the leader of the church.”
(1 Corinthians 4:15)

Lesson 10

“The little troubles we suffer now for a short time are making us ready for the great things God is going to give us forever.”
(2 Corinthians 4:17)

Lesson 11

“The pains given by a friend are faithful...”
(Proverbs 27:6)

Lesson 12

“It is not what a man thinks and says of himself that is important. It is what God thinks of him.”
(2 Corinthians 10:18)

Lesson 13

“He answered me, ‘I am all you need. I give you My loving-favor. My power works best in weak people.’ I am happy to be weak and have troubles so I can have Christ’s power in me.”
(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 1: The Cross: Wise or Foolish?

Bible Text

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Memory Verse

“But God has chosen what the world calls foolish to shame the wise. He has chosen what the world calls weak to shame what is strong.”

(1 Corinthians 1:27)

Word List

criminals: people who do wrong or illegal things, like killing and stealing. They are put in jail if they are caught by police.

illegal: not legal or right because there is a law against it. Those who do something illegal will be punished if they are caught.

People can be foolish in many different ways. Playing with wild and dangerous animals is foolish. Some people have died that way. People can believe that the stars tell them what to do or not do every day. People can decide to take **illegal** drugs and hurt themselves and others. Children may do something foolish like playing with matches which could cause a fire.

I have been foolish at times. When I was young, I played with one of my mom’s special things. I dropped it and broke it. I felt so bad about how foolish I had been that I made things worse. I hid the broken pieces under my pillow and did not tell her about it. Then a young child named Dewayne was blamed for breaking it. He took his naps in my bed while I was at school. My mom thought Dewayne broke it and hid it. I did not tell my mom the truth. I was so foolish. My foolish actions hurt Dewayne. If I had been wise and brave enough, I would have told my mom the truth.

Paul wrote some letters to teach new believers to give up their foolish ways. These letters are the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians. They were letters written to the church in the city of Corinth. Paul had gone to Corinth on his second trip to tell others about Jesus. Corinth was a large city with many problems. Many people worshiped Roman gods. Many people did bad things without any shame. This place needed to be changed by the love of Jesus. The new church in this city needed Paul’s teaching to help them give up their bad and foolish ways. They needed Paul’s strong words for wise living.

In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote to the church:

- to answer their questions

- to give them strong words about some problems
- to encourage them in their new faith in Jesus.

First, he wanted them to understand how foolish their faith looks to others. Next, he gave them strong words about not fighting with each other and about not doing the bad things they used to do. After that, Paul answered questions about the best way to live for Jesus. He explained the gifts God gives through the Holy Spirit. He told them what true love looks like. Lastly, Paul encourages them to live in the wonderful hope of their new forever-life in Jesus.

Is the Cross Foolish? **(1 Corinthians 1:18-25)**

In Corinth and everywhere in the world in Paul's time, the cross was used to shame and punish **criminals** by nailing them on it and leaving them to die. It was a terrible thing to see. People only thought of shame and death when they saw or heard about a cross. There were no crosses made of gold or silver. No one would ever wear a cross as jewelry. No one would put one on their wall or on their place of worship.

But the cross was chosen by God as the way Jesus would die to be punished for the sins of the world. Jesus chose to obey God and die on the cross because He loved people so

much. He took the punishment for all the wrong things every one of us has done.

The new believers in Jesus in the city of Corinth knew this. They also knew how the people around them thought and felt about the cross. How were they to understand and talk about the cross to others?

Paul explained that God's wisdom is not the same as the wisdom of people. There are two kinds of people: those who are dying in sin and those who are being saved from the punishment of sin. Those who are dying in sin think the cross is foolish. Those who are being saved know that Jesus' death on the cross is the power of God and not foolish at all.

God is so great and so wise that the greatest wisdom of people looks foolish when you look at both together. Paul asks the Corinthians to try to think of a person who is so wise that they know everything (v. 20). Even the wisest man on earth would not be able to know God by using wisdom. There is only one way to know God: to believe that Jesus' death on the cross saves those who decide to become followers of Jesus. There is no other way.

The good news that Jesus died on a cross so people can know God does not sound like good news to many people. It sounds foolish. It had always been God's plan to give His Son for our sins. God's ways are not like our ways. In Isaiah 55:9, God says, "For as the

heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

People want to do everything their way. They want to do something special to be accepted by God. They want to do something to make God love them. Romans 3:22 says, “Men become right with God by putting their trust in Jesus Christ. God will accept men if they come this way. All men are the same to God.” We cannot make ourselves right with God. Only God could do that. His plan is that we are to choose to trust in Jesus.

Are Followers of Jesus Foolish?

(1 Cororinthians 1:26-31)

Who were the people in the church at Corinth? Were they foolish people? How had their lives changed since Paul helped them become followers of Jesus? Who chose them

Things to Think About

1. Many people love power, being smart, and being beautiful. How can these things stop them from putting their trust in Jesus?
2. Why does the cross seem foolish to so many people? What can we tell them?
3. Can Jesus' followers be proud that Jesus chose them? Why or why not?
4. Whom did Jesus die for? What did God choose to have Jesus do because of people's wrong-doing?
5. How does a person become a follower of Jesus? Are you a follower of Jesus?
6. What reason does Jesus give His followers for the life they live?

to become believers and followers of Jesus?

Through Paul's writing, God tells us that the people in the church of Corinth were like you and me. God chose them when they were not wise or powerful. They did not have special or powerful families. The people of the world saw them as foolish and weak. They saw them as not important at all.

But God had a reason for choosing these people. None of them could be proud about God choosing them. God gave them new life through Jesus. Jesus made them right with God. Jesus made them free from sin. God chose them, and He gets all the glory!

Things to Remember

The cross seems foolish to the people who do not understand it. These people are not followers of Jesus. But the cross was God's wise choice. The cross gives hope to the followers of Jesus.

The power of the cross changes the followers of Jesus. Because of His death on the cross, our sins are forgiven. The cross gives us new life. Jesus' death on the cross makes us right with God. Even though our bodies will die one day, our soul and spirit will live forever in heaven with Jesus.

We are called to share with others that Jesus died and rose again from the dead. We are to show the love of Jesus to those around us. A person must put their trust in God's

choice to send Jesus to the cross for our sins. They must believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Then and only then can they do the wise thing and become true followers of Jesus.

The cross is a gift given by Jesus. Will you accept this beautiful gift from God today? Will you tell others about this gift even when they may think it is foolish? Love the cross and the hope it brings to all who believe!

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

18 Preaching about the cross sounds foolish to those who are dying in sin. But it is the power of God to those of us who are being saved from the punishment of sin.

19 The Holy Writings say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise people. I will put aside the learning of those who think they know a lot."

20 Where is the man who is wise? Where is the man who thinks he knows a lot? Where is the man who thinks he has all the answers? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.

21 In His wisdom, He did not allow man to come to know Him through the wisdom of this world. It pleased God to save men from the punishment of their sins through preaching the Good News. This preaching sounds foolish.

22 The Jews are looking for something special to see. The Greek people are looking for the answer in wisdom.

23 But we preach that Christ died on a cross to save them from their sins. These words are hard for the Jews to listen to. The Greek people think it is foolish.

24 Christ is the power and wisdom of God to those who are chosen to be saved from the punishment of sin for both Jews and Greeks.

25 God's plan looked foolish to men, but it is wiser than the best plans of men. God's plan which may look weak is stronger than the strongest plans of men.

26 Christian brothers, think who you were when the Lord called you. Not many of you were wise or powerful or born into the family of leaders of a country.

27 But God has chosen what the world calls foolish to shame the wise. He has chosen what the world calls weak to shame what is strong.

28 God has chosen what is weak and foolish of the world, what is hated and not known, to destroy the things the world trusts in.

29 In that way, no man can be proud as he stands before God.

30 God Himself made the way so you can have new life through Christ Jesus. God gave us Christ to be our wisdom. Christ made us right with God and set us apart for God and made us holy. Christ bought us with His blood and made us free from our sins.

31 It is as the Holy Writings say, "If anyone is going to be proud of anything, he should be proud of the Lord."

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 2: Grow Up as Christians and Stop Fighting

Bible Text

1 Corinthians 3:1-17

Memory Verse

“Jesus Christ is the Stone on which other stones for the building must be laid. It can be only Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Word List

eternity: forever; time with no beginning or ending

foundation: the very bottom or first level of a building that supports the building from underneath

People fight. People get angry and say things that hurt other people. This happens every day.

Does it happen in the church? Yes, because the church is made of people. But this is not the way it should be. The people of the church should not hurt each other, but should love each other. We should not act like small children.

Jesus prayed for His followers that they would be one as He and His Father are one

(John 17:20-21). He also said that the world would know we are His followers because of our love for each other (John 13:35).

Paul wanted the church in Corinth to know how to be the best followers of Jesus by growing up in Him.

Do Not Act Like the World

(1 Corinthians 3:1-4)

Paul tells those in the church at Corinth that they are acting like baby Christians. A young baby can only drink milk. He said he had to give them milk instead of meat. This means that he had to teach them easy lessons because they could not understand harder things. He wanted to teach them more but they were not ready. Babies need to grow up! The Corinthians needed to grow up!

Their biggest problem was that they were still acting like the people of the world. They would argue and fight about being followers of different teachers. The followers of Paul were fighting with the followers of Apollos. They were jealous of each other. This is how children and people of the world act. Paul knew that this is not how he had taught them to think and act.

Know That God Does Everything

(1 Corinthians 3:5-9)

God is the Father of all Christians. All true Christians are followers of Jesus. Those who have grown up in their faith know this.

They do not argue about which teacher or preacher is best. They do not think of themselves as followers of anyone except Jesus.

Every teacher, preacher, missionary, and believer has a job to do. All are God's servants. Paul talks about these jobs as a word picture of farming. Word pictures helped the Corinthians (and now us) to understand Paul's teaching. A farmer must plant seeds. Then he must water the seeds. God makes the seeds grow.

The same is true in the church. God asks us to plant and water seeds by telling people about Jesus. The first time they hear about Jesus is when the seed is planted. Every time they hear about Jesus or something from the Bible, those seeds are watered. God is the one Who works in their hearts and causes the seeds to grow. God brings people to Himself.

God gives people the gifts of being good at doing certain things. When the teacher and the preacher tell others about Jesus, they are doing the job that God gifted them to do. God gives these gifts. God causes people to trust in Christ. He is the one Who is important. He is the one Who does everything.

Know That God Will Test You (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

Paul now changes from the farming word picture to a building word picture. He writes about himself and then every believer as a builder.

The **foundation** is the most important part of a building. A strong foundation is the best start to a strong building. The rest of the building is built on the foundation. Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith and the church.

Paul writes using the word picture of a building as the people in a church. He laid the foundation stones for the church in Corinth by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with them. When they put their trust in Jesus, the church began. Other teachers came and put more stones on the foundation to continue to build the church with their teachings. He says that each teacher and believer must build on the foundation carefully. Then the church will be good and strong. It is important that each be laid on Jesus Christ only. Jesus is the Stone, the strong foundation.

Next, Paul writes with a word picture of a building as a believer in the church. Believers build their lives with beautiful stones or with poor things like wood or straw. This is built with the work they do, whether good or bad that helps or hurts the church.

The good work that is done is like beautiful stones. Examples of this kind of work are loving, serving, and sharing Jesus with others. This kind of work is beautiful to God because it builds up the church. This kind of work lasts into eternity.

The bad work is like building with wood, grass, or straw. Example of bad work

are doing and thinking only of yourself, doing things without God's help, and doing the wrong things. These kinds of actions will hurt the church. This kind of work does not last.

Together, the good and the bad work is tested by God at the end of time. God will test the work of each believer's life. The test will burn up the bad work and leave the good work. God will give a reward to each believer who has good work left after the test. Some believers will have nothing left after the test, but they will still be saved. They will not have any reward but they will have eternity in heaven. Paul does not tell us what kind of reward, but there will be rewards.

Help the Church (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

Every believer in the Corinthian church had a job to do. Every believer today has a job to do in the church. The job is to build up

Things to Think About

1. Are you a follower of Jesus? If so, are you a baby or a grown-up Christian? How can you grow in your faith?
2. What can you see in your life that is like the world? What needs to change so you can grow?
3. Why do people in the church fight? How can the fighting stop? What can you do to help?
4. How are you helping or hurting your church? What gifts do you have to build up the church?
5. Do you know that you are God's servant and that Jesus wants you to tell others the good news to help build the church? What good work does God want you to do? What work will pass the test?

the church. God gives believers what they need to do this kind of work.

The house of God that Paul writes about is the group of believers that were the church in Corinth. The Holy Spirit lives in each believer. The Holy Spirit works in the church. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are God. Together, they work in the church and they are One. There is only one God. This is hard to understand because God is so much greater than we are.

Paul gives a strong warning to the believers in Corinth that they must not destroy the church. They had to grow up and stop fighting. Fighting can destroy a church.

Destroying a church is very serious. God will punish anyone who does something that causes a church to be destroyed. The house of God is the church, and the church is the people of God. The church is holy because God is there.

Things to Remember

Everything that God told the church in Corinth through Paul's writing is true for all churches and all believers. Too many churches have been destroyed by people fighting. Paul would tell these people to stop acting like babies and grow up! The Holy Spirit in each believer works to help each person to become more grown up in their faith.

Believers need to remember that each one is a servant of God, and no servant of God

is any better than another servant. Each believer needs to be a follower of Jesus only, not another person. God will test each person's work. If the church is hurt, there will be trouble for them. Grown-up people who love Jesus and each other will stop the church from being destroyed.

Grow up and build up the church!

1 Corinthians 3:1-17

1 Christian brothers, I could not speak to you as to full-grown Christians. I spoke to you as men who have not obeyed the things you have been taught. I spoke to you as if you were baby Christians.

2 My teaching was as if I were giving you milk to drink. I could not give you meat because you were not ready for it. Even yet you are not able to have anything but milk.

3 You still live as men who are not Christians. When you are jealous and fight with each other, you are still living in sin and acting like sinful men in the world.

4 When one says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I am a follower of Apollos," does not this sound like the talk of baby Christians?

5 Who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only servants owned by God. He gave us gifts to preach His Word. And because of that, you put your trust in Christ.

6 I planted the seed. Apollos watered it, but it was God Who kept it growing.

7 This shows that the one who plants or the one who waters is not the important one. God is the important One. He makes it grow.

8 The one who plants and the one who waters are alike. Each one will receive his own reward.

9 For we work together with God. You are God's field. You are God's building also.

10 Through God's loving-favor to me, I laid the stones on which the building was to be built. I did it like one who knew what he was doing. Now another person is building on it. Each person who builds must be careful how he builds on it.

11 Jesus Christ is the Stone on which other stones for the building must be laid. It can be only Christ.

12 Now if a man builds on the Stone with gold or silver or beautiful stones, or if he builds with wood or grass or straw,

13 each man's work will become known. There will be a day when it will be tested by fire. The fire will show what kind of work it is.

14 If a man builds on work that lasts, he will receive his reward.

15 If his work is burned up, he will lose it. Yet he himself will be saved as if he were going through a fire.

16 Do you not know that you are a house of God and that the Holy Spirit lives in you?

17 If any man destroys the house of God, God will destroy him. God's house is holy. You are the place where He lives.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 3: Cleaning the Church

Bible Text

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Memory Verse

“We know that our old life, our old sinful self, was nailed to the cross with Christ. And so the power of sin that held us was destroyed. Sin is no longer our boss.” (Romans 6:6)

Word List

discipline: as used in this lesson, *discipline* means punishing sinful actions to encourage change for the good

puffed-up: thinking too highly of oneself

tough love: love expressed in a hard way especially to encourage better actions

My wife and I served in a church in Pennsylvania for ten years. The person who cleaned the church was really good. That church could pass a “white glove test.” If the church had been as clean from sin as it was clean from dirt, we would have been one of the best churches in the state.

Churches need to be clean from serious sin. Only then can they honor God and be used by God. In this chapter, Paul turns to a

new problem. Remember our unit title? “Strong Words for Wise Living.” Paul is going to use very strong words in this chapter.

Sex Sins in the Church

(1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Paul could hardly believe what he heard. There was a problem of sex sins in the church. It was really bad. At that time in the Roman Empire, there was a lot of sex sins. But the sin that was happening in the church was even worse than usual. A man in the church – someone who called himself a Christian – was living with and sleeping with his father’s wife. Paul was in shock.

Something had to be done about this problem right away. Even though Paul was in Ephesus, he said he had already found the man guilty. The man’s sin was widely known. He had done this on purpose. It was still going on. He did not seem to want to turn from his sin. There needed to be **discipline**.

Paul told the church what to do. Church discipline is the job of the whole church, not just one leader. They were to call a meeting. Paul would be present in spirit. The meeting would be in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would be done according to His rule. And by His power, they were to hand this man over to Satan.

“Hand this person over to the devil.” This is a very strong action. It does not mean

the man is losing his salvation. It also does not mean the church is giving up on him. But it does mean removing him from the church. He could no longer be part of the church, because the church was to be a place where Jesus was loved, obeyed, and worshiped. The Lord's power is at work in church discipline when it is done carefully and according to Scripture.

The reason given for doing this is very important. The reason is that, "His body is to be destroyed...." Many Bible teachers think this refers to physical suffering or even to physical death. The Bible tells of people dying because of their sin (Leviticus 10:1-3), even in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:30)! But this is not really what Paul seems to be saying here.

Another way to understand verse 5b is to know *body* translates as the Greek word for *flesh*. Flesh in Greek means the same as in English. It can mean skin. It can mean the meaty part of our bodies, as in flesh and bones. But in the Bible, and especially in Paul's letters, it can mean "sinful nature." That makes perfect sense here. The sinful man is handed over to Satan. The hoped-for result is that his sinful nature no longer has control of his life. He stops living as a slave to his sinful nature (see Memory Verse).

The final purpose of church discipline is that the sinful man stops sinning. Church discipline is **tough love**. Its goal is always to bring the sinning believer back to the Lord.

Paul thinks of the second coming of our Lord Jesus. He wants this man to be there rejoicing with the rest of the Corinthian church.

A Spiritually Puffed-Up Church (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

Paul had more cleaning to do in the church at Corinth. In fact, there was a bigger problem. The church was full of spiritual pride. The problem of sex sin had not bothered them at all. They should have been sad and sorry for what was happening to someone in their church. Instead, they were **puffed-up** as if nothing was wrong.

Paul tells them their pride is not good. He teaches them through a word picture about baking (v. 6b). Many Bible versions use the word *yeast*, because that is what we use today. In the Greek text, it actually talks about *leaven*. In the ancient world, yeast was not common. Instead, they used leaven to make bread. Leaven was a little bit of last week's dough which was set aside. As it sat, there would be a chemical change. It would then be added to the new batch of dough, making it rise. What a perfect picture this was for the puffed-up Corinthian Christians. Just a little leaven (a little sin) puffs-up the entire batch of dough (the church). They need to "clean out the old leaven" to clean out the church.

Paul is a great Bible student. He explains what the Old Testament says about

leaven. Every year at Passover and the Supper of Bread Without Yeast (called the Feast of Unleavened Bread), all the leaven was removed from Jewish houses. Paul applies this Old Testament law to the Corinthians' problem. He says, "Clean out the old leaven." First, this refers to the sinful man. His sex sin was a danger to the whole church. Second, Paul is talking about the much bigger problem of the church members' pride. They needed to clean out the sin from their lives, too.

The goal is that the Corinthian church be like new bread with no leaven in it. The goal is a clean church. And Paul reminds us how this is possible. It is because of Jesus. He is the true Passover lamb. We escape God's judgment because of Jesus' blood. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). We are forgiven and clean because of His death in our place. The

Things to Think About

1. Hopefully, you and I do not have really bad sins in our lives like the man in these verses. Yet there is always sin in our lives. Are we willing for Jesus to clean out some more of that old leaven? Ask yourself: Do I want to be cleaner? Do I really want to be clean from my sin? Do I really want to know Him better? Do I want to please Him more?

2. In verse 10 and again in verse 11, Paul lists some other serious sins besides sexual sin. How can these lists help a church know when it may need to use church discipline?

spiritual truth is the church is already clean.

This idea is at the heart of what Paul teaches about Christian living. Be who you already are, spiritually, in Christ. You are clean. Live that way! Act that way.

A Clean Church Saving a Dirty World (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

Paul wrote a letter to Corinth before 1 Corinthians. One thing in the letter was this: They were to stay away from people who do sex sins. The Corinthians did not understand this. They thought Paul was saying to stay away from *all people* who do sex sins and *all people* who are selfish, who steal, and who are idol worshippers. But Paul knew that was not possible. He said, "To get away from people like that, you would have to leave this world!" Paul was telling them this: Do not stay in close contact with people who say they are believers but who keep on sinning. Keep the church clean from those sins.

Things to Remember

Believers are saved from God's judgment by Jesus' blood. We are already forgiven and clean. Through Christ, we must keep the church clean.

Spiritual pride is very dangerous. It is like leaven. You hardly notice it. But before long, it has spread everywhere. God is against those who are puffed-up, but He shows His loving-favor to those who do not try to honor

themselves (1 Peter 5:5).

Once in a while, really serious sin gets in the church. Then the church must practice tough love and use church discipline:

- Love for and rescue of believers caught in serious sin.
- To remove serious sin from the church.
- To encourage a church clean from sin.
- So the church keeps a good witness before the world.
- Remembering what Jesus has done for us.
- So we can worship God better.

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

1 Someone has told me about a sex sin among you. It is so bad that even the people who do not know God would not do it. I have been told that one of the men is living with his father's wife as if she were his wife.

2 Instead of being sorry, you are proud of yourselves. The man who is living like that should be sent away from you.

3 I am far from you. Even if I am not there, my spirit is with you. I have already said that the man is guilty of this sin. I am saying this as if I were there with you.

4 Call a meeting of the church. I will be with you in spirit. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by His power,

5 hand this person over to the devil. His body is to be destroyed so his spirit may be saved on the day the Lord comes again.

6 It is not good for you to be proud of the way things are going in your church. You know a little yeast makes the whole loaf of bread rise.

7 Clean out the old yeast. Then you will be new bread with none of the old yeast in you. The Jews killed lambs when they left Egypt. Christ is our lamb. He has already been killed as a gift on the altar to God for us.

8 Bread with yeast in it is like being full of sin and hate. Let us eat this supper together with bread that has no yeast in it. This bread is pure and true.

9 I told you in my letter not to keep on being with people who do any kind of sex sins.

10 I was not talking about people doing sex sins who are bad people of this world. I was not talking about people of this world who always want to get more or those who get things in a wrong way or those who worship false gods. To get away from people like that you would have to leave this world!

11 What I wrote was that you should not keep on being with a person who calls himself a Christian if he does any kind of sex sins. You should not even eat with a person who says he is a Christian but always wants to get more of everything or uses bad language or who gets drunk or gets things in a wrong way.

12 It is not for me to judge those outside the church. You are to judge those who belong to the church.

13 God will judge those outside the church. So you must put that sinful person out of your church.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 4: Removing All Stumbling Blocks

Bible Text

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Memory Verse

“Since you are free to do as you please, be careful that this does not hurt a weak Christian.” (1 Corinthians 8:9)

Word List

conscience: the part of the mind that makes you know your actions are right or wrong and tells you to do right or good.

sacrifice: (verb) the act of giving something to a god (idol) in worship

stumbling block: Something done by one believer which may be copied by another believer. The Bible does not say the action is wrong. But for the second believer, it feels like sin, and doing it could make his faith weaker.

Over the years, my wife has taken some falls she will never forget. This is the one I will never forget. I was picking her up on a Friday afternoon. She was walking toward the car. One minute she was at the right front bumper. The next moment she disappeared!

I can still remember my panic. I jumped out of the car and raced around to the other side. There she was, flat on the ground. She had tripped and fallen over a parking bumper.



If I had gotten out of the car in the first place, maybe she would not have fallen. But this brings me to the point of the lesson: Christians do not need to put **stumbling blocks** in the way of other believers. We need to live in love and think about the good of others. Let's look at what Paul wrote about this problem in Corinth.

Temples and Temple Food in Ancient Corinth

Paul begins chapter 8: “I want to write about food that has been given as a gift in worship to a false god.” He is answering a letter the Corinthian church wrote to him. In their letter, they disagreed with some of the things Paul was teaching. One of those things was about eating food sacrificed to false gods at the temples.

Ancient Corinth was filled with temples to false gods. It had at least 12. A

temple to the god Apollo was right in the middle of the city. Every day, animals were sacrificed in worship at these temples. Some of the meat was burned on the altar. This was for the false god. Part of the meat was eaten at the temple in a religious meal. The rest of the meat was sold for home use.

First Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:23-33 describe three situations involving this meat. One is eating the meat at the temple (8:10). One is being a dinner guest of an unbeliever (10:27). The third situation is buying this leftover meat at the store to take home (10:25). The Corinthian believers wanted to be able to do all three things. Most of them were probably doing it anyway.

Love Is the Key

Paul's answer starts with him agreeing with them, at least for the moment. Yes, they understand all about false gods and food sacrificed to them. And so does he. Then a word of wisdom from the apostle. "Knowing about it makes one feel important." It was puffing them up. Paul was telling them where they were going wrong.

Knowledge puffs up. "But love makes one strong." Love builds up. In the Christian life, knowledge is important, but love is more important. The proof a person has a relationship with God is not how much he knows. The proof is if he loves God. And the

love a Christian has for God will flow over as love for his fellow believers.

So right at the start, Paul is teaching the key idea: Christian living is about love. The Corinthians were emphasizing their knowledge. Yet they were actually missing the most important thing: love. For all of their knowledge, they had some very important things to learn. True knowledge is about love. In verses 7-13, Paul will teach them how to apply love to the situation of eating food sacrificed to false gods.

Knowledge: Not Unimportant

The Corinthian Christians were using their knowledge in the wrong way. That was not good. Yet Paul did not want to teach that knowledge is unimportant. He uses some of the things they wrote in their letter. We know false gods are really not gods at all (v.4). We know there is only one true God. We know food is just food. It does not bring someone closer to God (v.8). So Paul agrees with them.

The longest and most important thing he adds is about God. He wants to remind them there is no one or nothing that is like our God. He is the one and only. And "He made us for Himself." Christians have purpose. We should live to love, obey, serve, worship, tell others about, and give glory to our great God. Life is not about ourselves. That piece of knowledge could help the Corinthians.

The Weak Christian

“Not all men know this” (v.7). Some people in the church who were going to the temples just like they did before they became believers. When they ate the meat at the temple, their **consciences** told them it was wrong. In their heads, they knew the meat was just meat. But their consciences were not yet fully changed by the truth. Paul calls these believers weak Christians. Their consciences were not strong yet from being taught biblical truth. Their conscience and the rest of their mind were not in agreement.

It would be easy to speak badly about a weak Christian. It could be said: their faith needs to grow. That may be. But Paul was worried about what is in the heart of the rest of the Corinthian church. They were focused on themselves. They were worried about their rights. They were showing no love. Love is patient and kind (1 Corinthians 13:4). There

Things to Think About

1. Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to stop going to the temples of the false gods. This was a huge change. This was a big thing to give up. Is there a big thing from your life before you believed in Jesus that you need to give up?
2. Sometimes a choice falls between good and bad, between right and wrong. “Gray area choices” are those things in the middle. What are some gray areas in our world? Paul wants the Corinthian believers to think about how doing some things (just because they can) might hurt other believers. Read 1 Corinthians 8; 10:23 to 11:1; and Romans 14.

is a time and place to train a weak Christian.

First, there needs to be love and care.

Be Careful

In the middle of the chapter is this warning. In terms of grammar, it is a command. Be careful! Jesus used this command when He warned, “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees...” (Mark 8:15). Be careful. Watch out. Be on the look-out not to hurt a weak Christian.

In verse 9 there is a thought that brings one to a stop. That is a good thing when trying to be careful. In the original text the word stumbling block is used. It is where the NLV talks about “this does not hurt a weak Christian.” So we are reminded again, stumbling blocks can hurt. Now here is the thought that stops me. The verse starts by talking about freedom. That is the this of “this does not hurt a weak Christian.” In Greek it pictures taking our freedom and turning it into a stumbling block! Here is the picture a little slower. There is the freedom and rights which the Corinthians saw as good. And it is turned, it is changed into a stumbling block which hurts weak Christians. That is a sad picture. It makes you think. Be careful!

Christian love is on the look out not to use its freedom in a wrong way. It does not want to hurt a brother in Christ. Philippians 2:4 says not to look out for your own interests

only, but for what is good for others, too. And remember the second great commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

No Stumbling Blocks (1 Corinthians 8:12-13)

Keeping the church free of stumbling blocks is no small matter. Making a fellow believer stumble is a sin. It is a sin against the weak Christian. It is also a sin against Christ Himself (v.12). To keep that Christian brother from tripping and falling, love will give up its freedom (v.13).

Since my wife’s fall 20 years ago, I have tried to watch out for her. I help keep her away from anything that could make her stumble. That is what love does.

Things to Remember

If we have the knowledge God wants us to have, we know Christian living is about love. Christian love tries never to put a stumbling block in the way of another believer. Christian love is ready to give up its rights for the sake of other Christians.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1 I want to write about food that has been given as a gift in worship to a false god. We all know something about it. Knowing about it makes one feel important. But love makes one strong.

2 The person who thinks he knows all the

answers still has a lot to learn.

3 But if he loves God, he is known by God also.

4 What about food that has been given as a gift to a false god in worship? Is it right? We know that a false god is not a god at all. There is only one God! There is no other.

5 Men have thought there are many such gods and lords in the sky and on the earth.

6 But we know there is only one God. He is the Father. All things are from Him. He made us for Himself. There is one Lord. He is Jesus Christ. He made all things. He keeps us alive.

7 Not all men know this. They have given food as a gift in worship to a god as if the god were alive. Some men have done this all their lives. If they eat such food, their hearts tell them it is wrong. 8 Food will not bring us near to God. We are no worse if we do not eat it, or we are no better if we eat it.

9 Since you are free to do as you please, be careful that this does not hurt a weak Christian. 10 A Christian who is weak may see you eat food in a place where it has been given as a gift to false gods in worship. Since he sees you eat it, he will eat it also.

11 You may make the weak Christian fall into sin by what you have done. Remember, he is a Christian brother for whom Christ died.

12 When you sin against a weak Christian by making him do what is wrong, you sin against Christ.

13 So then, if eating meat makes my Christian brother trip and fall, I will never eat it again. I do not want to make my Christian brother sin.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 5: Gifts from the Holy Spirit to the Church

Bible Text

1 Corinthians 12:4-21, 27

Memory Verse

“You are all part of the body of Christ.”
(1 Corinthians 12:27)

Word List

discern: to come to know, recognize, or understand

instruments: tools used to make music

melody: the main part of a song

orchestra: a group of people who play music together and are led by a leader called a conductor.



cello

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cello_front_side.jpg

In high school, I played in an **orchestra**. The leader of the orchestra chose the cello for me. Our orchestra needed another cello player. Every day I practiced at home. My cello alone did not always sound like a song. But when I played with the other **instruments**, I could hear the tune.

Each instrument gave something different to the song to make a **melody**. All of us had different instruments. We played them differently, but we all followed our leader to make beautiful music.

This is the way the church works, too. Our leader is God, Who chooses the best gift for each of us as a part of the church. He gives us these gifts as tools to work together with others to make the church what He wants it to be. We do not all use our gifts in the same ways. Each of us must do our part to make our church the beautiful body He plans for it to be.

One Giver (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

The believers in Corinth came from many different backgrounds. But they all had become part of the family of God. They all had the same Father. They all said, “Jesus is Lord.” Jesus is like an umbrella that we stand under. His grace and mercy save us from sin. We all stand together under the same grace of Jesus. He moves us where He wants us to be when we stay under His umbrella of grace and mercy.

Our Lord is the One who decides what is needed in the church. There are many different kinds of work needed in the church. So, the Holy Spirit gives us *all* different gifts. Every believer gets a gift from God! We do not make up the gifts ourselves. We cannot

earn a gift from the Spirit. We receive certain gifts because of what God wants, not because of who we are. He gives us gifts that we do not deserve. God gives us these gifts to be used to bless the church. Ask yourself, “Do I use my gift for *me* or for *us*?”

Different Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:8-11)

Paul began a list of some of the gifts we might have from the Holy Spirit of God. Words of wisdom and sound teaching were both needed in the church in Paul’s day. Wisdom comes from spending time with God so that we think like God thinks. Every church needs someone who sees our world through God’s eyes. Then we need people to teach us what they have learned about God. This is more than teaching information or facts. It is sharing truth that is learned through living life with God. An effective teacher is someone who knows the Word of God and lives it. Both wisdom and teaching come from God alone. They are given as gifts to the church.

Every believer must come to God through faith. But the gift of faith is stronger, bolder faith. When someone in our church leads us to boldly trust God, we are all made stronger. The best player on a basketball team makes all the other players better. But he cannot play the game by himself. We all need each other.

The person with the gift of healing might be a doctor or nurse. But there are people who can bring God’s healing through prayer. God uses both doctors and prayer to heal. But God’s healing is not just for the body. When families are healed, when our thoughts grow more godly, the Holy Spirit is doing a powerful work. Only God can do this.

Every church needs someone to speak the Word of God. Our preachers need God’s gift to make His Word clear. But what if someone does not speak the truth of God? The church is protected by a gift of the Spirit when someone can tell the difference between the truth of God and false teaching. False teachers can hurt the church. But the gift to **discern** truth from false teaching protects the church.

Some people have the gift of speaking in special sounds. This is a prayer language. Some people in Corinth thought it was the most important gift. But this gift does not help the church unless someone can tell what is being said. Some people can tell what these sounds mean. Both speaking and telling what has been said are gifts from the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit Who decides who gets what gift. We should not think that one gift is more important than another. We should not try to get a gift that we see in others. Ask yourself, “What gift has the Holy Spirit given me to bless my church?”

One Body (1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 27)

Paul compared the church to a body. The church is the body of Christ. Every member of a church is part of the body of Christ. There are many parts of the body. What if the hand thought it was more important than any other part simply because it can be seen? What if the heart stopped working because no one saw it beating? The body cannot be healthy unless every part does the work it is supposed to do.

Some people in the church in Corinth thought they were more important to the church than others. Their gifts were easier to see. People noticed them. Others thought their gifts were not important. Sometimes they stopped using their gifts because they thought they were not important to the church. When that happened, the church was not healthy. Ask yourself, “Am I using the gift God has given me to make my church stronger?”

Things to Think About

1. Have you ever lost the use of an arm or leg because of an injury? How did the loss affect your daily life?
2. How does the loss of a gift of the Spirit affect your church?
3. Has someone led you to trust God more by their great faith in Him?
4. How can you use your gift of the Spirit to help someone in your church?

Things to Remember

It was God who designed our bodies to work the way they do. He made the parts to do certain jobs. No one can argue with God’s wisdom in making our bodies. In fact, we are surprised at His beautiful work.

We cannot argue with God’s wisdom in the church, either. We are all part of the body of Christ. We all have a job to do. The church cannot do all it is called to do unless every part is working. When all the parts of a church are working properly, it is a beautiful picture of God’s relationship with us. We are blessed by God’s wisdom in His church.

What is your job in the church? God has given you one or more gifts to use to make the church healthy. The church cannot be all it is designed to be unless every part is working. Ask God to reveal your gift of the Spirit to you. Ask other members of your church what they see in you that is a gift from God. Then start using that gift to strengthen the church. There are blessings waiting for us when we are faithful to God’s calling on our lives. Ask yourself, “What blessing am I missing because I am not using the gift of the Spirit God has given me?”

1 Corinthians 12:4-21, 27

4 There are different kinds of gifts. But it is the same Holy Spirit Who gives them.

5 There are different kinds of work to be done for Him. But the work is for the same Lord.

6 There are different ways of doing His work. But it is the same God who uses all these ways in all people.

7 The Holy Spirit works in each person in one way or another for the good of all.

8 One person is given the gift of teaching words of wisdom. Another person is given the gift of teaching what he has learned and knows. These gifts are by the same Holy Spirit.

9 One person receives the gift of faith. Another person receives the gifts of healing. These gifts are given by the same Holy Spirit.

10 One person is given the gift of doing powerful works. Another person is given the gift of speaking God's Word. Another person is given the gift of telling the difference between the Holy Spirit and false spirits.

Another person is given the gift of speaking in special sounds. Another person is given the gift of telling what these special sounds mean.

11 But it is the same Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, Who does all these things. He gives to each person as He wants to give.

12 Our own body has many parts. When all these many parts are put together, they are only one body. The body of Christ is like this.

13 It is the same way with us. Jews or those who are not Jews, men who are owned by someone or men who are free to do what they want to do, have all been baptized into the one body by the same Holy Spirit. We have all received the one Spirit.

14 The body is not one part, but many parts.

15 If the foot should say, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that would not stop it from being a part of the body.

16 If the ear should say, "I am not a part of the body because I am not an eye," that would not stop it from being a part of the body.

17 If the whole body were an eye how would it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how would it smell?

18 But God has put all the parts into the body just as He wants to have them.

19 If all the parts were the same, it could not be a body.

20 But now there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you." Or the head cannot say to the feet, "I do not need you."

...

27 You are all a part of the body of Christ.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 6: An Even Better Way

Bible Text

1 Corinthians 12:31 to 13:13

Memory Verse

“And now we have these three: faith and hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.”
(1 Corinthians 3:13)

Word List

boast: to talk with pride about something good we have done

jealous: feeling or showing an unhappy or angry desire to have what someone else has

negative: focused on the bad qualities of someone or something

When is a good deed wrong? When is a great act empty? When is a gift not enough? Paul had written to the church in Corinth about the gifts God gives to His church. But could those gifts be used badly? Could the church misuse God’s gifts? Paul explained that the church is like a body. All the parts of a body must work together. For a person to live well, he must have both a healthy body and a healthy mind and heart.

The same is true in the church. The

members of every church must use the gifts from the Spirit to show Christ to the world. We do that when we have hearts and minds like God’s heart and mind. Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 5:14a: “For the love of Christ puts us into action.” The reason we use our gifts is to show the love of Christ to the world. We do that best when God’s love puts us into action.

Without Love

(1 Corinthians 12:31 to 13:3)

The people in Corinth had many words for love. English speakers have only one. We say we love chocolate. We love our families and friends. We say God loves us. Clearly, all three uses of the word are not the same.

We love chocolate for the pleasure it brings us. We love our cars because they brings value to our lives. We love the things that we like or that bring us pleasure.

We say we love our families and friends. This means we have drawn a circle around those people we love. We do not love people outside that circle. We often put limits on our love.

God’s love is not like this. He does not love us because of what we bring to Him. God’s circle of love includes all the people of all nations. Paul used a word for love that can only be used for the love of God. God’s love is unselfish. He seeks what is best for the one

He loves. God even loves His enemies. We learn how to love from God because “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Some people were causing problems in the church in Corinth. They were using their gift of tongues selfishly. They were not thinking of others and were making worship noisy. No one could see or understand the love of God in that noisy, selfish church.

Paul said even the smartest person in the room should show God’s love. Some people might understand the deepest things of God. But without love, they fail to bring others to Christ. The best preacher or teacher is nothing without love. To move a mountain is to solve a difficult problem. Solving the problem of a mountain does not show the love of God unless we think about the people who live on that mountain.

We can even give away everything we own to the poor. But unless we do it in love, we are wasting it all. Many people suffer for Christ. But they can still show His love even while they are suffering. God’s love helps us endure hardship.

What Love Is and Is Not (1 Corinthians 13:4-6)

How do we show God’s love? We can understand His love by looking at the life of Jesus. Jesus never gave up on His followers even when they did not understand. There are

people serving God in very difficult places.

They wait many years for even one person to understand and follow Christ. God’s love helps them to never give up.

God’s love is kind. Being mean to others while doing a good deed does not work. No one learns about Christ when our good deeds are not done in love.

Love is not **jealous**. It does not **boast**. We become jealous of others when we think they have something we do not have. When we are focused on ourselves in a **negative** way, we are not seeing ourselves as God sees us. The opposite is also true. Some people in Corinth were boasting about how good they were. They wanted others to notice them. When our focus is on ourselves, we are not sharing God’s love. It is impossible to boast and love at the same time. It is impossible to show love and be jealous at the same time. If I have pride, I am losing the battle against sin in my life.

Love never thinks of itself. We think of ourselves when we focus upon what we want. This often makes us angry. When we get angry we forget about being loving. But God’s love does not get angry. There will always be people who disagree with us. But we must remember they are not our enemies. The devil uses these people. He is our enemy. When we see them in that light, we can show God’s love to them.

Love does not remember when other people hurt us. In Isaiah 43:25 we see how God's love works: "I, even I, am the One Who takes away your sins because of Who I am. And I will not remember your sins."

As children of God, we must guard our hearts and minds. Does what I watch shame Christ? Am I reading sinful stories? Do I enjoy things that would make Christ sad? When God's love controls me, I love the things that God loves. And in His power, I stay away from the things He hates.

Love Lasts Forever (1 Corinthians 3:7-13)

God's love never gives up. In the power of God's love, we have faith in every word God has spoken. We hope in Him forever. We keep His ways in the face of suffering. God's love never fails. Never think you are wasting your time and energy when you act in love. Although you may not see results today, others can see Christ in what

Things to Think About

1. Describe the perfect teacher. What is that teacher like?
2. Do you consider how your work will affect others for good and for God?
3. Which is more important to you, your things or the people in your life?
4. What do you most want people to remember about you after you are gone?

you do out of love.

Every prophet comes to the end of his life and stops telling God's Word. Even the most gifted tongues will one day be still. What we have learned fades away. We only know part of Who God is. We only see a little bit of His plan now.

But one day we will see the whole picture. There will come a day when we know all of God. Then we will forget about the little bit we did in God's great plan. We will not worry about what part we played. We will rejoice in Him and His wonderful ways.

Paul explained it this way: What we understood as children is nothing compared to what we understand as adults. What we thought was important is forgotten when we grow up. In the same way, we will forget the cares of this life and joyfully take hold of heaven. God has given me gifts and work to do to show His love to the world. Some day in heaven, I will see my life through God's eyes. I will see how my little part fit into His great plan, and I will rejoice!

Things to Remember

There are three things that last forever: faith, hope and love. My good deeds, gifts and abilities will fade away. But faith that never gave up, hope that lasted a life time, and love that always pointed to Jesus will last forever. Of faith, hope, and love, the greatest is love.

1 Corinthians 12:31 to 13:13

12:31 But from your heart you should want the best gifts. Now I will show you even a better way.

13:1 I may be able to speak the languages of men and even of angels, but if I do not have love, it will sound like noisy brass.

2 If I have the gift of speaking God's Word and if I understand all secrets, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I know all things and if I have the gift of faith so I can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

3 If I give everything I have to feed poor people and if I give my body to be burned, but do not have love, it will not help me.

4 Love does not give up. Love is kind. Love is not jealous. Love does not put itself up as being important. Love has no pride.

5 Love does not do the wrong thing. Love never thinks of itself. Love does not get angry. Love does not remember the suffering that comes from being hurt by someone.

6 Love is not happy with sin. Love is happy with the truth.

7 Love takes everything that comes without giving up. Love believes all things. Love hopes for all things. Love keeps on in all things.

8 Love never comes to an end. The gift of speaking God's Word will come to an end. The gift of speaking in special sounds will be

stopped. The gift of understanding will come to an end.

9 For we only know a part now, and we speak only a part.

10 When everything is perfect, then we will not need these gifts that are not perfect.

11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child. I understood like a child. Now I am a man. I do not act like a child anymore.

12 Now that which we see is as if we were looking in a broken mirror. But then we will see everything. Now I know only a part. But then I will know everything in a perfect way. That is how God knows me right now.

13 And now we have these three: faith and hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 7: Hope in Life after Death

Bible Text

1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 12-14, 20, 23, 50-57

Memory Verse

“He will take away death for all time. The Lord God will dry tears from all faces. He will take away the shame of His people from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 25:8)

Word List

harvest: the crop that is gathered

proof: something that shows what is true or correct

witness: someone who sees something happen and tells about it

suddenly: very quickly and usually in an unexpected way

We have peach trees on our farm. Last year we did not have a **harvest**. But this year, the peaches look really good. We showed the first fruit to our friends. Those first peaches make us look forward to more peaches soon.

God did the same thing to show us what it will be like when Jesus returns. He showed us the risen body of Jesus as the first fruit of life after death. We can see what a

risen body will be like by looking at Jesus after He rose from the grave. We can look forward to having a risen body when He returns to gather us in.

Listen to Good Witnesses

(1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

The Law said that there must be two **witnesses** that agree in order to decide a case. Paul called many witnesses. They all agreed that Jesus rose from the dead. The first witness was God’s Word. There are over 300 things God promised that the Savior would do. Jesus did all of those things in His life and death. God promised that the Savior would die and be raised to life three days later. And that is exactly what happened. We can trust God’s Word.

There were people who had spent time with Jesus. Jesus’ closest followers saw Him after He came back to life. Peter said that he had seen the risen Jesus. Matthew and John both wrote of seeing Jesus alive again. 500 people saw the risen Lord at one time. 500 people would not all make the same mistake. Some of those people were still living 30 years later when Paul wrote this letter.

James was one of the four brothers of Jesus. He grew up with Jesus in the home of Mary and Joseph. But James did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God (Mark 6:3 and John 7:5). His life changed after he saw the

risen Lord. James believed when he saw Jesus alive after He had died on the cross. He knew for sure that Jesus had been raised to life. He knew that Jesus was the Son of God. He became a powerful witness for Jesus.

Paul had been changed by the risen Lord, too. He had fought hard against the church. One day Jesus appeared to Paul as he was on the road to take believers to jail. Paul's life **suddenly** changed when he met Jesus face-to-face. He saw the risen Lord much later than the other followers. But the love of Christ changed him completely. Paul's story was another powerful witness for Jesus.

Think About It

(1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 20, 23)

Paul preached the truth when he said that Christ was raised from the dead. The people of Corinth had not seen Jesus, but they believed Paul's witness. Their lives had been changed when they believed in Jesus. They trusted that He had died for their sins and had been raised to life again after three days. Now, they were arguing over the truth that had set them free. Why would they do that?

Some people in Corinth said that no one is raised back to life after they die. They argued that we live and die and that is the end of life. Paul said they should think about that. If no one is raised to life, then Jesus could not have been raised either. Over 500 witnesses

and the Word of God could not be that wrong. If Christ was not raised to life, then He was just a man like all the rest of us. Why would people die for Christ if it was all a lie? Think about it.

Jesus is **proof** that there is life after death. Paul knew for sure that Jesus had been raised from the dead because he saw Jesus. Jesus was raised first so that we can be raised later. The word Paul used describes the first fruit from a harvest. The first fruit was a sign of more to come. Jesus is the first One to be raised. He proved that His followers will also be raised to life.

Other people said that believers in Jesus would never die. Again, Paul said they should think about that. There had already been believers who had died. But the death of this body is not the end of life. Jesus and Paul both said death is like sleep. It does not last forever. But one day, just like Jesus, believers will rise again to live forever with Him in His home in heaven.

All this will happen in the right order. Jesus rose first. He is preparing a place for us to live with Him (John 14:2-3). One day, He will return for us. All those who have died will rise from their graves with new bodies. Believers who are still living will be changed, too. Suddenly, we will have bodies made for living in heaven.

Look at the Facts**(1 Corinthians 15:50-57)**

Paul called his readers to look at the facts. The God who made the heavens also made the earth. A seed looks nothing like the plant that grows from it. It is the same with our new life. Our human bodies are nothing like what we will be in heaven. The sun and moon are not like us. The flesh of fish, birds, and animals are all different. It should be no surprise that our bodies are different from the bodies we will have in heaven. Our human bodies will be changed so that we can live in heaven. There is no death or decay in heaven. Our human bodies will be changed to bodies that will never die, get sick, or decay.

When an army wins a battle, they blow a horn to say the battle has been won. It tells the winners and the losers to stop fighting. When Jesus comes again, there will be a loud blast from a horn. It will let all the world know that the war against sin and death has been won. Jesus will take us home with Him.

Things to Think About

1. What do you do to keep your body healthy?
2. What do you do to keep your spirit healthy?
3. How does knowing you will live forever with Christ change the way you live now?
4. Do you tell others the story of your changed life in Christ?
5. How does knowing Jesus rose from the dead help you deal with the death of a loved one?

Those who have already died in the fight will rise from their graves to go with Him in new bodies. Then those who are still alive will see their own bodies suddenly changed.

Paul quoted Isaiah, who said, “Death has no more power over life.” All our lives we fight against death. We eat and drink, sleep and work to keep our bodies healthy. It is easy for us to get sick and die. But there is no longer any need to fear death. Sin is the poison that makes us fear death. Because Jesus has defeated sin, we have no reason to be afraid of death.

Things to Remember

What does it take to find out the truth? We can ask people we trust what they know. We can think for ourselves about what makes sense. And we can look at the facts. Paul called the church at Corinth to do just those things when they asked questions about life after death.

God wants us to be thinking believers. We have witnesses from long ago that tell the truth. We can see changed lives all around us that prove that Jesus is alive. God wants us to think about it. It makes sense that God showed us what He wants in the life and death of Jesus. He wants us to live here like Jesus lived. He wants us to do the will of our Father in this life. He raised Jesus as proof that the death of this body is not the end of life. He wants us to live with Him forever.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

3 First of all, I taught you what I had received. It was this: Christ died for our sins as the Holy Writings said He would.

4 Christ was buried. He was raised from the dead three days later as the Holy Writings said He would.

5 Christ was seen by Peter. After that, the twelve followers saw Him.

6 After that, more than 500 of His followers saw Him at one time. Most of them are still here, but some have died.

7 After that, James saw Christ. Then all the missionaries saw Him.

8 Last of all, Christ showed Himself to me as if I had been born too late.

1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 20, 23

12 We preached to you that Christ has been raised from the dead. But some of you say that people are not raised from the dead. Why do you say this?

13 If the dead are not raised, then Christ was not raised from the dead.

14 If Christ was not raised from the dead, then what we preach to you is worth nothing. Your faith in Christ is worth nothing.

...

20 But it is true! Christ has been raised from the dead! He was the first One to be raised from the dead and all those who are in graves will follow.

...

23 This is the way it is: Christ was raised from the dead first. Then all those who belong to

Christ will be raised from the dead when He comes again.

1 Corinthians 15:50-57

50 Christian brothers, our bodies which are made of flesh and blood will not go into the holy nation of God. That which dies can have no part in that which will never die.

51 For sure, I am telling you a secret. We will not all die, but we will all be changed.

52 In a very short time, no longer than it takes for the eye to close and open, the Christians who have died will be raised. It will happen when the last horn sounds. The dead will be raised never to die again. Then the rest of us who are alive will be changed.

53 Our human bodies made from dust must be changed into a body that cannot be destroyed. Our human bodies that can die must be changed into bodies that will never die.

54 When this that can be destroyed has been changed into that which cannot be destroyed, and when this that does die has been changed into that which cannot die, then it will happen as the Holy Writings said it would happen.

They said, "Death has no more power over life."

55 O death, where is your power? O death, where are your pains?

56 The pain in death is sin. Sin has power over those under the Law.

57 But God is the One Who gives us power over sin through Jesus Christ our Lord. We give thanks to Him for this.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 8: Serving Through Suffering

Bible Text

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Memory Verse

“He gives us comfort in all our troubles...We give the same kind of comfort God gives us.”

(2 Corinthians 1:4)

Word List

authority: a quality that makes something true or real

firm: not weak or uncertain

forsake: to give up or leave entirely; abandon

When was the last time you received a handwritten letter? Most mailboxes are full of just bills and ads. Today, it is rare to receive a letter or note in the mail. Instead, emails and text messages come to our phones or computers. Sometimes comments or greetings reach our social media accounts. But a long letter from a friend is different. It is personal. It is full of feeling and important details. It takes time to write this kind of letter.

In today’s lesson, we will read about a special letter like this. It is a letter from Paul to the Corinthian church. Paul’s letter was filled with deep thoughts and strong feelings. Paul had spent more than a year with these Christians. Now he was far away from them. Paul’s letter to them was a reminder of his **firm** teachings and great care.

To be sure, the church at Corinth had many problems. They lived in a sinful city. They did not remember all Paul taught them. They followed false teachers. They argued with one another. Paul had already written one letter to the Corinthian church. But they kept having problems. Even so, Paul did not **forsake** this church. He wrote to them again. His letters taught them important things about the Christian life. His letters also taught about living together and helping and caring for others. Most of all, Paul wanted the Christians in Corinth to know the truth about God. Paul knew that understanding the truth about God would help them live in ways that honor God.

Paul’s Authority (2 Corinthians 1:1-2)

Paul’s greeting to the church in Corinth was a strong reminder. Some Christians in Corinth stopped trusting Paul. They stopped believing his teachings. They stopped following his instructions. This was a problem. So Paul began his letter by saying he was chosen by God. He also stated that

Timothy was with him. This showed that Paul did not work alone. Others agreed with his teaching. Others trusted in his work as a missionary. Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians that his **authority** came from God. He wanted to remind them that other Christians like Timothy trusted him.

Paul's greeting included "all God's people in the country of Greece" (v. 1). In this way Paul repeated that many people respected him. They knew God had chosen him to tell about Jesus Christ. Paul wished them loving-favor and peace from Jesus Christ. He wanted them to know the truth about Jesus. Then they could live the right way. Then they would know God's favor.

The Purpose of Problems (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that the Christian life is not easy. He wanted them to understand about troubles. He did not want them to think that Christians never have problems. This was a false teaching. Actually, Christians face many hard things. This does not mean that God's favor has left them. In fact, Christians can experience God's presence in the middle of life's troubles. Paul knew this. He wanted the Corinthians to know it, too.

Paul gave thanks to God for giving him comfort in his troubles (v. 3). In the past, Paul

had faced many troubles. Many Jews worked against Paul when he first went to Corinth. They said bad things about Paul and tried to hurt him (Act 18:12-17). But Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half. He faced many problems in Corinth. Even so, he stayed and "taught them the Word of God" (Acts 18:11).

Paul's troubles brought good to the people of Corinth. Because Paul stayed bravely faced his troubles, many people heard about Jesus. Many became Christians and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

The Corinthians should have remembered how God comforted Paul in those days. God's comfort helped Paul face trouble in Corinth and in other places. Paul reminded the Corinthians that God would also comfort them when they faced trouble. In this way, Paul and the Corinthians shared God's comfort. God's comfort connected them to each other. Paul wanted the Corinthians to live out this truth when they faced hard times. Then others would see God's power to help people when they face problems.

God's Power to Save (2 Corinthians 1:8-11)

In his life, Paul knew God's great power to save people from trouble. In telling about Jesus, Paul suffered many hard things. Many times he was beaten or put in prison. In Asia, he thought he would die (v. 9). But even

in Asia, Paul trusted God. He remembered God's power. God's power was strong enough to raise Jesus from the dead. God's power had saved Paul in the past. Paul trusted God to keep him safe in Asia. And he also trusted God's power would be the same in the future. Paul knew God's power could save him from any trouble.

In the middle of strong trouble, prayer was very important to Paul. Of course, Paul prayed to God. But Paul also knew that others prayed for him. In hard times, Christians come together in prayer. In this way, they share each others' troubles. Through prayer, Christians can see God's power at work. Through prayer, God shows His power and reveals His purpose. He is mighty to save (Zephaniah 3:17).

Things to Remember

The world is full of trouble (John 16:33). Christians should not pretend this is not true. Christians do not have to welcome trouble, but they do not need to hide from it, either. In happy times and in hard times, God is good. He brings deep comfort in times of great trouble. Christians can share God's comfort with others. Christians should trust God's goodness and share it with others when problems come.

God is not just good. He is also powerful. His power is greater than any trouble that may come. When Jesus died, God raised Him to life again. Is there any trouble greater than death? When Christians pray in hard times, they can see God's power at work. God's comfort and power in the lives of Christians show His great love for people. Praise God for His loving-favor that comes through Jesus Christ!

Things to Think About

1. What are some reasons why Christians face trouble?
2. Have you ever suffered for your faith? If so, what happened?
3. How has God comforted you in the midst of your suffering?
4. How does reading about Paul's suffering encourage you today?
5. How have you been able to use painful experiences from your past to comfort others who are suffering?

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

1 This letter is from Paul. I have been chosen by God to be a missionary for Jesus Christ.

Timothy is here with me and is writing to you also. We are writing to God's church in the city of Corinth and to all of God's people in the country of Greece.

2 May you have loving-favor and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Father Who shows us loving-kindness and our God Who gives us comfort.

4 He gives us comfort in all our troubles. Then we can comfort other people who have the same troubles. We give the same kind of comfort God gives us.

5 As we have suffered much for Christ and have shared in His pain, we also share His great comfort.

6 But if we are in trouble, it is for your good. And it is so you will be saved from the punishment of sin. If God comforts us, it is for your good also. You too will be given strength not to give up when you have the same kind of trouble we have.

7 Our hope for you is the same all the time. We know you are sharing our troubles. And so you will share the comfort we receive.

8 We want you to know, Christian brothers, of the trouble we had in the countries of Asia. The load was so heavy we did not have the strength to keep going. At times we did not think we could live.

9 We thought we would die. This happened so we would not put our trust in ourselves, but in God Who raises the dead.

10 Yes, God kept us from what looked like sure death and He is keeping us. As we trust Him, He will keep us in the future.

11 You also help us by praying for us. Many people thank God for His favor to us. This is an answer to the prayers of many people.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 9: Strong Love

Bible Text

2 Corinthians 1:12 to 2:4

Memory Verse

“...But we are to hold to the truth with love in our hearts. We are to grow up and be more like Christ. He is the leader of the church.”

(1 Corinthians 4:15)

Word List

clashed: to be in a situation in which you are fighting or disagreeing; to come into conflict with someone

humble: not proud or thinking of yourself as better than others

mature: fully grown or fully developed; like an adult

pride: a feeling that you are more important or better than other people

The church at Corinth was located in an important place. Corinth sat on the Mediterranean coastline. The city was a main port of trade in the Roman Empire. Traders could cross from the Mediterranean Sea to the Aegean Sea at Corinth. This was an important trade route between Asia Minor and Europe.

Because of this, many different kinds of people lived in there.

Corinth was home to people from all over the Roman Empire. They spoke many languages. They worshiped many different false gods. They worked at many kinds of jobs. They were rich and poor. They were slaves and free men. They were Jews and people who were not Jews. Corinth was a melting pot of beliefs, lifestyles, and religions.

Such different citizens had strong ideas about things. Their ideas often **clashed**. People in Corinth were full of pride about their ideas. Each group of people thought they knew better than the others. Each group of people thought their understanding of things was right. It is not surprising that the same thing happened in the Corinthian church. These church members argued about many things. Strong feelings of **pride** often caused problems among church members. And pride often kept them from working out those problems.

These kinds of problems even happened between Paul and the church. Paul spent many months with the church in Corinth. But after he left, some church members turned away from Paul’s teaching. They began listening to false teachers. They began to have their own ideas about Jesus. So Paul wrote to them to correct these false

teachings. But their pride kept them from listening to Paul's words. Their pride caused some to ignore the advice in Paul's first letter. The church continued to have many problems.

Strong Words to Proud People (2 Corinthians 1:12-14)

Paul loved the church at Corinth. He cared deeply for them. He wanted them to live the right way. He wanted them to walk in truth. So Paul wrote to them a second time. He did this with an honest heart. He knew they did not understand what he said in his first letter. Because of his strong love for the Corinthians, Paul did not give up. He tried again to help them understand the truth he taught them (v. 13).

This was not an easy thing to do. Paul's first letter used very strong words. These words probably made the Corinthians angry. Pride and anger never lead to truth and understanding. Paul knew the Corinthians had much to learn. He wanted them to grow in knowledge. He wanted them to grow in truth. He wanted them to become **mature** Christians. Paul knew that this was God's will for the Corinthians.

Broken Trust (2 Corinthians 1:15-22)

Writing another letter to the Corinthians was not Paul's first plan. At first, Paul wanted to visit this young church (v. 15). He could

have visited them twice. He planned to visit them on the way to Macedonia and again on the way back (v. 16). But Paul changed his mind about that visit. Many of the Corinthians did not like this change of plans. They questioned Paul's choice. They were angry at him for changing his mind. They felt Paul could not be trusted. But this was not true.

Paul was a true servant of God (v. 18). Both Timothy and Silvanus trusted Paul and his preaching. The men worked together to share the truth about Jesus Christ (v. 19). These men were special workers whom God set apart. They belonged to God and their work was pleasing to Him (v. 21). The Corinthians had many reasons to trust Paul. And Paul had a strong reason for changing his plans.

A Humble Heart (2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4)

The lack of trust between Paul and the Corinthians was a bad problem. But it was a problem Paul wanted to fix. Paul understood that some Corinthians were angry with him. He thought that visiting with them might make things worse. He had many things to tell them. He had more strong words to say to them (v. 23). He did not want anger to get in the way. Paul feared that anger might keep them from hearing his strong words. So he did not go to them right away.

Instead, Paul sent the Corinthians this second letter. He did not come to them, forcing them to obey his words. Paul did something different. He trusted God to grow their faith. He trusted God to change their hearts. He knew God had begun a strong work in them (v. 24). He believed God could grow their faith.

Paul was wise. He did not respond to pride with more pride. He did not respond to anger with angry words. He knew that God's power caused the Corinthians to have faith in Jesus. He knew that God's power would also cause them to grow. By letting God do this work in them, Paul was **humble**. He did not force the Corinthians to listen to him. And he did not force the Corinthians to follow him.

Most of all, Paul wanted the Corinthians to know he loved them (v. 4). He did not want to make them sad or angry (v. 1). His tears showed his deep love and

care. Paul showed a strong love in the face of many problems. This is the kind of love Christians should have for one another.

Things to Remember

When problems happen in the church, it is important to show love. Pride and anger only make problems worse. Jesus showed this kind of example. When men hung Him on a cross to die, Jesus did not respond in anger (Luke 22:34). He showed love and forgiveness to those who hurt Him.

When we follow Jesus, He gives us the power to have this kind of strong love for others. This kind of love changes people. It allows God's power to work in their lives. God has the power to change hearts and minds. His strong love is available to everyone, and Christians can share it with others.

Things to Think About

1. When was the last time you experienced a strained relationship?
2. What can you do to bring healing to a strained relationship?
3. When you face problems with others, do you usually confront them in love or in anger? Or do you often just run away from problems with others?
4. Is it easier for you to give forgiveness or receive forgiveness? Why?
5. What can you learn from this example between Paul and the Corinthians?

2 Corinthians 1:12 to 2:4

12 I am happy to say this. Whatever we did in this world, and for sure when we were with you, we were honest and had pure desires. We did not trust in human wisdom. Our power came from God's loving-favor.

13 We write to you only what we know you can understand. I hope you will understand everything.

14 When the Lord Jesus comes again, you can be as proud of us as we will be proud of you.

Right now you do not understand us real well.

15 It was because of this, I wanted to visit you first. In that way, you would be helped two times.

16 I wanted to stop to visit you on my way to the country of Macedonia. I would stop again as I came from there. Then you could help me on my way to the country of Judea.

17 Yes, I changed my mind. Does that show that I change my mind a lot? Do I plan things as people of the world who say yes when they mean no? You know I am not like that!

18 As God is true, my yes means yes. I am not the kind of person who says one thing and means another.

19 Timothy and Silvanus and I have preached to you about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In Him there is no yes and no. In Him is yes.

20 Jesus says yes to all of God's many promises. It is through Jesus that we say, "Let it be so," when we give thanks to God.

21 God is the One Who makes our faith and your faith strong in Christ. He has set us apart for Himself.

22 He has put His mark on us to show we belong to Him. His Spirit is in our hearts to prove this.

23 I call on God to look into my heart. The reason I did not come to the city of Corinth was because I did not want my strong words to hurt you.

24 We are not the boss of your faith but we are working with you to make you happy. Your faith is strong.

2:1As I thought about it, I decided I would not come to you again. It would only make you sad.

2 If I make you sad, who is going to make me happy? How can you make me happy if I make you sad?

3 That is why I wrote that letter to you. I did not want to visit you and be made sad by the ones who should be making me happy. I am sure when I am happy, you are happy also.

4 I wrote you with a troubled heart. Tears were coming from my eyes. I did not want to make you sad. I wanted you to know how much I loved you.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 10: Focus on Things That Last

Bible Text

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Memory Verse

“The little troubles we suffer now for a short time are making us ready for the great things God is going to give us forever.”

(2 Corinthians 4:17)

Word List

ignore: to act like you do not see or hear someone or something

overwhelm: to cause someone to have too many things to deal with

surrender: to agree to stop fighting or working because you know you will not succeed

It's time to throw in the towel. Have you ever heard this expression before? In English, this phrase means that it is time to quit. These words come from the history of the sport of boxing. When a boxer could not fight anymore, his trainer sent a signal. He would throw a towel in the center of the ring. This was a sign of **surrender**. It meant that the boxer was ready to give up the fight. This was a final act of defeat.

Have you ever wanted to give up on something? Sometimes life can be very hard. When things become difficult, it is not easy to keep going. Hard times often make people think about giving up. But giving up can end in painful results. It can destroy families. It can damage friendships. It can ruin businesses. It can crush all hope. Giving up is almost never the best option. So what can you do when life gets tough?

People often give up because they focus on the wrong things. It is easy to focus on pain or disappointment. It is easy to focus on hurt or sorrow. These are very strong feelings that are hard to **ignore**. Feelings like these can easily **overwhelm** a person.

Paul was no stranger to these kinds of feelings. Telling others about Jesus often causes hard things to happen to Christians. Telling others about Jesus is never an easy job. Paul was often beaten or put in prison. People even tried to kill him. It is easy to see how Paul might feel like giving up. But Paul did not focus on these hard things. Instead, he focused on God. He remembered what things truly mattered. This helped Paul to keep going even when others might have quit.

A Job to Do

(2 Corinthians 4:1-6)

Paul understood that God gave him an important job to do. God chose Paul to tell

others the truth about Jesus Christ. God chose Paul because of His loving-kindness (v. 1). He invited Paul to do this important work. Paul knew his job was a special gift from God. This was one reason Paul refused to quit. He understood God's purpose. He wanted to serve God well. Paul was not like the other false teachers in Corinth (v. 2). They worked only for money. Paul worked to honor God and please Him.

Paul worked honestly for God, but not everyone believed the truth about Jesus. Satan blinded some from seeing the truth (v. 3). The false teachers in Corinth helped keep many people stuck in sin (v. 4). This was part of Satan's work against God. Even though false teachers worked against him, Paul was faithful to tell the truth about Jesus (v. 5).

Paul told about the light of Jesus, which was Good News for everyone (v. 4). He had seen this light for himself. At one time, Paul worked hard against Jesus (Acts 9:4). But Paul saw a blinking light from God on the way to Damascus one day. The light of Jesus helped Paul understand the truth. Once Paul knew the truth about Jesus, he worked hard to tell others. Paul would not quit his job of telling others. He knew that the light of Jesus could wipe away the darkness of sin. Knowing this helped Paul to keep doing his job even when others worked hard against him.

A Light from God

(2 Corinthians 4:7-12)

Paul carried God's light with him wherever he went (v. 7). God's power had changed Paul's life. He was a different man than he once was. Nothing could make Paul quit (v. 8). Sometimes Paul faced trouble. Sometimes people made things hard for Paul. Still the light of God's presence shone brightly in Paul's life.

Even facing death could not stop Paul from telling others about Jesus (v. 11). Paul knew that God's power was greater than the power of death. After all, God's power raised Jesus back to life from the dead. Paul did not quit when he faced death because of people who worked against him.

A Hope for the Future

(2 Corinthians 4:13-18)

Paul was a strong Jew before he believed the truth about Jesus. He knew the Jewish writings. He remembered the words of the Book of Psalms (v. 16). The psalm writer had strong faith in God. He could not keep quiet about it. So he spoke about God. Paul had this same kind of faith. Even when hard things happened, Paul could not stop talking about Jesus.

No matter what happened, Paul relied on God's power to take care of him. He knew

God raised Jesus from the dead. Even if he died, Paul trusted God’s plan. He said, “God will take us to Himself” (v. 14). Paul knew he would be with God forever. This gave him courage to keep going when things were hard.

Paul kept his focus on the right things. He remembered what was important. It is easy to see problems and troubles. But hard times do not last forever. Pain and suffering do not last forever (v. 17). Only life with God lasts forever. Sharing the truth about Jesus can help others have life that lasts forever, too. Because Paul knew these things, he stayed focused on things that last (v. 18). This is how he found the strength to never give up.

Things to Remember

Paul was sure of God’s goodness. He was sure of God’s faithfulness. These things never change. They last forever. Paul focused on these things when trouble came. The

world is full of trouble. And trouble can distract us from the things that are most important. Many people give up when trouble comes. In troubled times, only those who focus on the things that last can stand strong. The things of God last forever. It is important for Christians to remember this. Otherwise, it is easy to quit.

The troubles that surround us do not have to make us weak. Our spirit can be strong no matter what happens around us (v. 16). Paul’s words tell us this is true. Paul’s life also shows us that this is true. In following Paul’s example, many people can receive God’s loving-favor. This means many will be saved from the punishment of sin. But this can only happen if Christians choose to focus on the things that last forever.

Things to Think About

1. Describe a time when you wanted to give up on something. What made you feel this way? What did you do about it?
2. How much time do you spend thinking about problems and troubles in your life?
3. What are the things that last forever? How much time do you spend thinking about these things?
4. Do you know someone who is facing many troubles and needs encouragement? What can you do to help them stay focused on the right things?
5. Where do you find strength when things are hard?

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

1 Through God's loving-kindness, He has given us this job to do. So we do not give up.

2 We have put away all things that are done in secret and in shame. We do not play with the Word of God or use it in a false way. Because we are telling the truth, we want men's hearts to listen to us. God knows our desires.

3 If the Good News we preach is hidden, it is hidden to those who are lost in sin.

4 The eyes of those who do not believe are made blind by Satan who is the god of this world. He does not want the light of the Good News to shine in their hearts. This Good News shines as the shining-greatness of Christ. Christ is as God is.

5 We do not preach about ourselves. We preach Christ Jesus the Lord. We are your servants because of Jesus.

6 It was God Who said, "The light will shine in darkness." He is the One Who made His light shine in our hearts. This brings us the light of knowing God's shining-greatness which is seen in Christ's face.

7 We have this light from God in our human bodies. This shows that the power is from God. It is not from ourselves.

8 We are pressed on every side, but we still have room to move. We are often in much trouble, but we never give up.

9 People make it hard for us, but we are not left alone. We are knocked down, but we are not destroyed.

10 We carry marks on our bodies that show the death of Jesus. This is how Jesus makes His life seen in our bodies.

11 Every day of our life we face death because of Jesus. In this way, His life is seen in our bodies.

12 Death is working in us because we work for the Lord, but His life is working in you.

13 The Holy Writings say, "I believed, so I spoke." We have the same kind of faith as David had. We also believe, so we speak.

14 We know that God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. He will raise us up also. God will take us to Himself and He will take you.

15 These things happened for your good. As more people receive God's favor, they will give thanks for the shining-greatness of God.

16 This is the reason we do not give up. Our human body is wearing out. But our spirits are getting stronger every day.

17 The little troubles we suffer now for a short time are making us ready for the great things God is going to give us forever.

18 We do not look at the things that can be seen. We look at the things that cannot be seen. The things that can be seen will come to an end. But the things that cannot be seen will last forever.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 11: Strong Words to Correct

Bible Text

2 Corinthians 7:5-16

Memory Verse

“The pains given by a friend are faithful....”
(Proverbs 27:6)

Word List

conflict: a strong disagreement or angry argument

harsh: unpleasant or difficult to experience

restored: to put back together something that is broken; to make new again

revenge: the act of hurting someone because they hurt you first

Recently, my oldest son was accepted to college. In fact, he was accepted to seven colleges. His dad and I are very proud of him. During his high school years, our family faced many hard things. Severe money problems, a tragic accident, a serious illness, and the loss of a grandparent made life very hard for all of us. Even in the middle of all this, my son worked hard at school. He earned good grades and won many awards. When my

son was accepted to his favorite college, we were filled with joy! We received the good news one day while he was at school. After school, we surprised him with the good news. Our family took great delight in celebrating with him.

It is always fun to share good news. Telling about a wedding or a new baby brings such joy. Winning a game or getting a new job is a good reason to celebrate. But what happens when the news is not so good? What happens when you have a hard truth to share? What happens when you need to point out a behavior that needs to change? What about the times when you must correct a person for their mistakes? These are words that people do not like to hear. These are difficult kinds of talks to have.

In the past, Paul had to share this kind of news with the church in Corinth. This church had many problems. Paul knew he must correct them. He knew they needed to see their mistakes. If they did not understand their mistakes, they would keep living the wrong way. Paul loved them. But he knew he must use strong words to correct them. He was afraid that his strong words might hurt his church he loved. It was a hard problem for Paul.

God's Comfort in Conflict

(2 Corinthians 7:5-7)

Paul found himself in a great **conflict**. Many from the church in Corinth were angry with Paul. He had already written them one letter with strong words to correct them. Many from the church in Corinth were angry with each other, too. They did not agree about Paul's teaching. They did not agree about the right way to live. The truth about Jesus caused them to argue with each other. Things were not good in Corinth. That is why Paul sent such strong words to them before.

While these things were happening in Corinth, Paul traveled to Macedonia. Even there, these conflicts troubled him. When he came to Macedonia, he was tired and afraid (v. 5). There were more problems for Paul in Macedonia, too. But God met Paul in the middle of such great conflicts. He brought comfort to Paul's heart (v. 6). He even brought Titus to encourage Paul. Titus had carried Paul's earlier letter to Corinth. He returned to Paul, telling him that many in Corinth wanted to help him (v. 7). They also wanted to see him. These warm greetings made Paul happy.

God's Purpose in Conflict

(2 Corinthians 7:8-11)

This bit of good news from Corinth brought joy to Paul's heart. He worried about the strong words in the letter he had sent to Corinth. But now he knew those strong words helped the church. Because of his strong words, the Corinthians turned from sin to God (v. 9). Paul's words made many Corinthians sorry for their sins. By turning away from sin, they could be saved from the punishment of sin. Their sorrow caused them to follow God in obedience.

This is the kind of sorrow that pleases God. It brings new life in Christ. It is different from the sorrow of the world. The "sorrow of this world brings death" (v. 10). It makes people feel only guilt and shame. It does not bring change. It does not lead to life. It only destroys people. Paul was happy because the Corinthians had the right kind of sorrow.

Paul was joyful when he heard how the church in Corinth responded to conflict. The strong words of his letter made them angry. But they did not choose to stay angry. Instead they chose to make things right (v. 11). They allowed God to work in their hearts. This brought joy and peace to Paul and the Corinthians.

God's Power to Bring Peace

(2 Corinthians 7:12-16)

Sometimes good things come from strong words. This happened with Paul and the Corinthians. But how? First, Paul truly wanted to solve a problem. He did not want to punish anyone. He did not want to embarrass anyone. He did not seek **revenge** against anyone who harmed him. In fact, Paul did not name the people who caused conflict in Corinth (v. 12). By not naming them, Paul protected them from further problems. Paul's main purpose was to end the conflict in Corinth.

Titus had carried Paul's first strong letter to Corinth. And the church in Corinth responded in the right way. Now Paul was glad about the **harsh** letter he sent the Corinthians. He was not glad that the letter made them sad. But he was glad that God

used the letter to bring peace. God **restored** the relationship between Paul and this church that he loved. With God's help, they felt respect and trust for each other again (v. 16).

Things to Remember

Dealing with conflict is never fun. But conflict happens everywhere. It happens in families. It happens with friends. It happens at work. It even happens in church. It happened between Paul and the Corinthian church. Paul knew he could not ignore the conflict. He knew he needed to solve this problem. God did a great work in the church at Corinth through Paul's strong words. Paul's words were strong, but his love was stronger. Paul's example shows Christians the right way to deal with conflict.

In times of conflict, God remains faithful. He brings comfort and help. He makes a way for peace. And He works out His good purposes in our lives. Sometimes we might want to run away from conflict. If we do this, we miss the chance to see God at work. When conflict brings strong words and feelings, we might feel afraid. But if we seek God's help in conflict, we can trust Him to guide us in the right way.

Things to Think About

1. Have you ever had to bring bad news or hard words to someone? What did you do?
2. When someone brings strong words to correct you, how do you respond?
3. What is the difference between the sorrow that God uses and the sorrow of this world? Have you experienced both?
4. Why do people often run away from important conflicts they should face?
5. What important things do you learn from Paul's example in the way he handled his conflict with the Corinthians?

2 Corinthians 7:5-16

5 When we arrived in the country of Macedonia, we had no rest. We had all kinds of trouble. There was fighting all around us. Our hearts were afraid.

6 But God gives comfort to those whose hearts are heavy. He gave us comfort when Titus came.

7 Not only did his coming comfort us, but the comfort you had given him made me happy also. He told us how much you wanted to see us. He said that you were sad because of my trouble and that you wanted to help me. This made me happy.

8 I am not sorry now if my letter made you sad. I know it made you sad, but it was only for awhile.

9 I am happy now. It is not because you were hurt by my letter, but because it turned you from sin to God. God used it and you were not hurt by what we did.

10 The sorrow that God uses makes people sorry for their sin and leads them to turn from sin so they can be saved from the punishment of sin. We should be happy for that kind of sorrow, but the sorrow of this world brings death.

11 See how this sorrow God allowed you to have has worked in you. You had a desire to be free of that sin I wrote about. You were angry about it. You were afraid. You wanted to do something about it. In every way you did what you could to make it right.

12 I sent this. It was not written only because of the man who did the wrong or because of the one who suffered.

13 All this has given us comfort. More than this, we are happy for the joy Titus has. His spirit has been made stronger by all of you.

14 I told him how proud I was of you. You did not make me ashamed. What we said to Titus proved to be true.

15 He loves you all the more. He remembers how all of you were ready to obey and how you respected him.

16 I am happy that I can have complete trust in you.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 12: Facing Strong Attacks

Bible Text

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Memory Verse

“It is not what a man thinks and says of himself that is important. It is what God thinks of him.”
(2 Corinthians 10:18)

Word List

confronted: opposed or challenged in a direct or forceful way

criticism: negative words that express judgment and disapproval

philosopher: someone who studies about knowledge, truth, and the meaning of life

Aristotle was a famous man in ancient Greece. He was a well-known teacher and **philosopher**. Many of his wise words are remembered today. According to Aristotle, “**Criticism** is something we can avoid easily by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing.” This is another way to say that people often criticize those who do important things. This means that leaders often face criticism.

Aristotle’s words relate to Paul’s life. Paul was a key leader in the early church. He was clearly *not* a man who did nothing. In fact, Paul did many important things to tell others about Jesus. If Aristotle’s words are true, it makes sense that Paul would face criticism. It should be no surprise that other people attacked Paul with harsh words.

Harsh words of criticism can cause hurt and pain. They can cause anger and arguments. These kinds of words were a problem in the church at Corinth. These kinds of words can ruin a man’s reputation. In Paul’s case, something mattered even more than his reputation. Paul feared that serious criticism could keep him from doing the job God gave him. He feared these attacks might hurt his efforts to tell others about Jesus.

Paul knew he must respond to these attacks. He also knew that responding to criticism requires great wisdom. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul **confronted** those who attacked him.

Paul Faces Strong Attacks

(2 Corinthians 10:1-2)

Paul spent many months in Corinth telling others about Jesus. The church in Corinth started with those who first heard and believed Paul’s message. Paul stayed with these new Christians for a year and a half. He lived with them. He preached to them. He

taught them about the Christian life. Paul lived among them in a kind and gentle way (v. 1).

After some time, Paul left Corinth. He went to new places where he could tell more people about Jesus. While he was gone, there were many problems in the church at Corinth. They did not keep living the way that Paul taught them. False teachers came to Corinth preaching things about Jesus that were untrue. They also said things about Paul that were untrue. Sadly, the new Christians in Corinth believed these lies.

Later, Paul learned what had happened in Corinth. So he wrote letters to the Corinthian church. At least one of these letters contained very strong words. Paul hoped his strong words would correct any lies the Corinthians believed. But the false teachers told more lies about Paul.

These false teachers said the Corinthians should not trust Paul. They said his kindness and gentleness were fake (v.1). They said the harsh words in Paul's letters showed what Paul was really like. The false teachers claimed that Paul only wanted to have power over the Corinthians.

Paul assured them this was not true. Many leaders want "the things of the world" like power, fame, and riches (v. 2). They will do or say anything to get these things. But Paul was not like other world leaders. These were not the reasons Paul used strong words

in his letter to the Corinthians. Paul used strong words because he wanted them to live in ways that please God.

Paul confronted the lies of the false teachers (v. 2). Things of God mattered more to Paul than things of the world.

God Provides a Strong Defense

(2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

The false teachers used lies and tricks to fight against Paul. Paul did not fight back in the same way (v. 3). False teachers used the weapons of the world to cause fear and fighting in Corinth. But Paul relied on spiritual weapons to fight these lies. Paul sought God's help instead. Paul knew that God's weapons are stronger than the world's weapons. This is because God has more power than anything in the world.

Paul understood that Satan is the enemy of God. Paul knew that Satan was behind these strong attacks against him. Worldly men spoke lies about Paul. But it was surely Satan who was seeking to destroy Paul. It was Satan who was seeking to stop the Good News about Jesus Christ. Paul knew that the "things God gives to fight with" can "destroy the strong-places of the devil" (v. 6).

Stay Focused on God's Work

(2 Corinthians 10:7-18)

Paul did not see things the way other men did (v. 7). He looked at these attacks through spiritual eyes. He focused on the way God was working. He remembered that God's power was helping him do the important job God gave him (v. 8). Because of this, he did not focus on what other men did or said. He did not compare himself to others (v. 12). He did not become distracted by false attacks. Instead, he said, "We will follow the plan of the work He has given us to do...." (v. 13). Paul stayed focused on telling others the truth about Jesus (v. 16). He knew this is what mattered to God. To Paul, what God thought was more important than what men said or thought (v. 18). Pleasing God is always more important than pleasing men.

Things to Remember

Paul set a strong example. He confronted the lies of the false teachers. But he did not fight those lies with other lies. Paul spoke the truth plainly and clearly. And he trusted God's power to defeat the devil's plans. This helped Paul stay focused on the special work God gave him to do.

Christians often face strong attacks like the one Paul faced. Sometimes these attacks come from outside the church. Sometimes these attacks come from inside the church. In either case, it is important to seek God's wisdom in responding to criticism. When attacks come, remember to focus on God instead of the attacker. Fight with spiritual weapons and trust God to give a strong defense. Most of all, seek truth and peace. Keep telling others about Jesus. These things will help others to understand the Good News and be saved from the punishment of sin.

Things to Think About

1. Have you ever faced strong attacks that were unfair? How did you feel?
2. When someone attacks you, what is the first thing you think about doing?
3. What is the difference between the fighting like the people of the world and using those things God gives to fight?
4. What is the best advice someone has given you about how to handle criticism?
5. What do you think the Corinthians learned from the way Paul handled the strong attacks he faced?

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

1 I, Paul, ask you this myself. I do it through Christ Who is so gentle and kind. Some people say that I am gentle and quiet when I am with you, but that I have no fear and that my language is strong when I am away from you.

2 Do not make me speak strong words to you when I come. Some people think we want the things of the world because of what we do and say. I have decided to talk to these people if I have to.

3 It is true, we live in a body of flesh. But we do not fight like people of the world.

4 We do not use those things to fight with that the world uses. We use the things God gives to fight with and they have power. Those things God gives to fight with destroy the strong-places of the devil.

5 We break down every thought and proud thing that puts itself up against the wisdom of God. We take hold of every thought and make it obey Christ.

6 We are ready to punish those who will not obey as soon as you obey in everything.

7 You are seeing things only as men see them. If anyone feels sure he belongs to Christ, he should remember that we belong to Christ also.

8 I am not ashamed if I say this of myself. The Lord gave me the right and the power to help you become stronger, not to break you down.

9 I do not want you to think I am trying to make you afraid with my letters.

10 They say, "His letters are strong and they make us think. When he is here with us, he is weak and he is hard to listen to."

11 What we say in our letters we will do when we get there. They should understand this.

12 We do not compare ourselves with those who think they are good. They compare themselves with themselves. They decide what they think is good or bad and compare themselves with those ideas. They are foolish.

13 But we will not talk with pride more than God allows us to. We will follow the plan of the work He has given us to do and you are a part of that work.

14 We did not go farther than we were supposed to go when we came to you. But we did come to you with the Good News of Christ.

15 We take no pride in the work others have done there. But we hope your faith will keep growing because of help from others. Then we will grow because of you.

16 We hope to preach the Good News in the countries on the other side of you. Then we would take no pride in work done by another person in another country.

17 If anyone wants to be proud, he should be proud of what the Lord has done.

18 It is not what a man thinks and says of himself that is important. It is what God thinks of him.

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

Strong Words for Wise Living

Lesson 13 God's Loving-Favor Is Enough

Bible Text

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Memory Verse

"He answered me, 'I am all you need. I give you My loving-favor. My power works best in weak people.' I am happy to be weak and have troubles so I can have Christ's power in me."

(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Word List

boast: to show too much pride in yourself or in something you have done

culture: the way a group of people lives and thinks

impress: to cause someone to admire you

In Paul's time, the Romans ruled most of the known world. The Roman Empire spread from Asia to Europe to Africa. It was a rich and powerful empire. The Romans ruled through the use of strong force. In all that they did, they sought power and glory. It was common for Roman leaders to **boast** and brag. This was part of their way of life.

Prideful leaders surrounded the church in Paul's time. These leaders often talked

about themselves. They enjoyed bragging about their own greatness. The false teachers in the Corinthian church acted the same way. They were full of pride. They talked about themselves often. They boasted about their spiritual experiences. These false teachers were a problem. They did not tell the truth about Jesus. They did not teach the Corinthians to live the right way. They even told lies about Paul and the work God called him to do.

Many in Corinth followed these false teachers. They were **impressed** by their proud talk. But Paul challenged these false teachers. He confronted their lies. When he did, the Corinthians wanted Paul to act like the false teachers. They wanted to hear proud talk from Paul, too.

Paul did not enjoy proud talk. Before Paul followed Jesus, he was a very proud man. But one day on the road to Damascus, Paul met Jesus in a blinding light. Following Jesus changed Paul. Paul no longer thought of himself as more important than others. Following Jesus taught Paul that God is more important than any man. Paul wanted the Christians in Corinth to know this, too.

Paul Has a Special Dream

(2 Corinthians 12:1-6)

Paul did not see the good in proud talk about himself (v. 1). He would rather talk

about the greatness of God. He knew that talking about Jesus was more important than talking about himself. But Paul understood the Corinthians. He knew they expected to hear proud talk from their leaders. This was part of the Corinthian's **culture**.

Paul cared about the church and Corinth. He wanted to keep their respect. Then they would listen to him. Then he could teach them more about Jesus. So he said a few things about himself. But Paul did not feel at ease with such proud talk. So he did not use his own name. Instead, Paul talked about himself without using his own name.

Paul talked about “a man who belongs to Christ” (v. 2). Everyone listening to Paul's words knew this man was Paul. Paul told about a special experience he had with God. This happened fourteen years earlier, near the beginning of Paul's missionary work. Paul had a special dream from God. This dream brought Paul into the very presence of God. The dream was very real. Paul could not tell if his body or just his spirit went to the highest heaven (v. 2). This experience was very powerful for Paul. But he never bragged about it to others. Still, he never forgot.

Paul wrote about his experience. He emphasized that God was in control of what happened (v. 3). Paul did not understand all that happened, but God knew. Paul saw mighty things “when he was in the highest

heaven” (v. 4). These things were so powerful that he could not tell about them. He did not have the right words to describe this kind of glory.

Paul knew no man could understand such things without seeing them for himself (v. 4). Paul told the truth about what happened. He was not like the false teachers who told lies (v. 6). Even so, Paul did not want to boast about his dream. He told what happened so that people could hear about God's great power and glory.

Paul Has Trouble in His Body (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

God showed Paul many great things. But Paul did not feel this made him better than other men. Paul knew that he was weak and sinful without God's power in his life. In fact Paul talked about his great weakness. He said that Satan gave him great trouble in his body to remind him of his weakness (v. 7). Paul asked God three times to take away this trouble (v. 8). But God did not. Paul's trouble kept him from being proud.

All people are like Paul. It is easy for people to feel proud. It is easy for people to think they are better than others. Pride happens because of sin. When trouble comes, people remember their weakness. They remember they need help. Trouble has a way

of turning the human heart toward God.

When people do not have trouble, they forget that they need God. Satan meant for Paul's trouble to hurt him (v. 7). But Paul's trouble caused him to look to God instead.

In the midst of trouble, God reminded Paul of His loving-favor. God's loving-favor comes from Jesus Christ (v. 9). Paul's troubles actually helped him to rely on God's strong power. This was a blessing. In this way, Paul took joy in his troubles and weakness (v. 10). The troubles did not bring him joy. But relying on God's power did. This is why Paul could be proud of his weaknesses.

Things to Remember

God's loving-favor is available at all times. There is no trouble big enough to block us from it. This is why Paul had such great joy. His troubles only reminded him how great God is. God is greater than

anything we may face. He has power over things that cause us fear. He has power over things that cause us anger. He has power over things that cause us pain. He even has power over death itself. That is how He raised Jesus back to life from the dead. God's loving-favor is enough to help us face any kind of trouble!

Around the world, Christians face all kinds of trouble. Like Paul, some are beaten. Some are rejected. Some are lonely. Some are put in prison. Some are afraid. Some are even killed. These troubles can make people feel small and weak. But when we are small, we can understand how big God is. And when we are weak, we can see God's great strength. No matter what we face in life, God's loving-favor is enough.

Things to Think About

1. In what ways are you tempted to talk about yourself with proud words?
2. Do you have a great weakness that troubles you? How has God used this weakness in your life? How has he used it in the lives of others?
3. In the middle of trouble, do you praise God like Paul did? Why is this easy or difficult for you?
4. Was there a time you had to endure trouble that you did not deserve? What did you do?
5. How can you be strong, even when you feel weak?

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

1 I have to talk about myself, even if it does no good. But I will keep on telling about some things I saw in a special dream and that which the Lord has shown me.

2 I know a man who belongs to Christ. Fourteen years ago he was taken up to the highest heaven. (I do not know if his body was taken up or just his spirit. Only God knows.)

3 I say it again, I know this man was taken up. But I do not know if his body or just his spirit was taken up. Only God knows.

4 When he was in the highest heaven, he heard things that cannot be told with words. No man is allowed to tell them.

5 I will be proud about this man, but I will not be proud about myself except to say things which show how weak I am.

6 Even if I talk about myself, I would not be a fool because it is the truth. But I will say no more because I want no one to think better of me than he does when he sees or hears me.

7 The things God showed me were so great. But to keep me from being too full of pride because of seeing these things, I have been given trouble in my body. It was sent from Satan to hurt me. It keeps me from being proud.

8 I asked the Lord three times to take it away from me.

9 He answered me, "I am all you need. I give

you My loving-favor. My power works best in weak people." I am happy to be weak and have troubles so I can have Christ's power in me.

10 I receive joy when I am weak. I receive joy when people talk against me and make it hard for me and try to hurt me and make trouble for me. I receive joy when all these things come to me because of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.