

CATCH ON

CATCH ON STUDY RECAP

From September 7th to September 21st
With Study Questions in preparation for September 28th

Summary

II Corinthians 2:12-17 - Chapter 3:6

Who is Sufficient?

Over the last few weeks we have begun studying what John thinks is one of the greatest passages in the New Testament. It is found in Second Corinthians, beginning in Chapter 2 and runs through to Chapter 7. Here is the clearest explanation in all the Word of God of the secret of the Apostle Paul's remarkable ministry.

It is such a splendid example of what genuine, true, authentic Christianity¹ is. Yet, strangely enough, this great passage is a parenthesis in this Second Corinthian epistle; it is a digression on the apostle's part.

Paul had been speaking to the Corinthians about his pressures, and his problems, and the problems in Corinth. (He was waiting in Macedonia for Titus to return with news of what was happening in the church at Corinth.)

He was upset, worried, and anxious feeling great disturbance of mind and out of that there grew this magnificent description of the power by which he labored and lived. It comes in almost as a spontaneous outburst from the apostle's heart to counteract the sense of failure and despair which he was feeling in his ministry at the time.

¹ *Authentic Christianity* by Ray Stedman

Section 1 Ministers of the New Covenant
II Corinthians, Chapter 2:12-14
September 7th

*12. Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me,
13. I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.*

Those brief words gather up a tremendous experience in Paul's life. He had gone to Troas from Ephesus, as he tells us here, to preach the gospel of Christ. This was his great joy everywhere. Wherever he went he knew he would find people sunk in despair, filled with darkness, their lives governed by superstition and fear, being hounded, haunted, and hurt by all they were going through -- people who, without realizing what they were doing, had fallen into terrible, hurtful things that were destroying them. It was Paul's great joy to come with the good news of Jesus Christ, the one who understood the hurts of men, the deliverer, the healer of hurts, the one who had the power to touch human lives and transform them. Paul longed to preach the gospel, as he tells us, in all the earth if he could, because it was such a tremendous thing to see the power of God let loose among men to set them free.

So here he is in Troas to do what is his heart's desire. The door was open to the marketplace, people responding and wanting to know more. Yet, as he tells us here, he was unable to take advantage of it. He was anxious about what was going on in Corinth. Too troubled, he had to leave.

Briefly identify a time when you worked and worked on something only to see it begin to fall apart?

How did you feel? (Personally failing? Anxious? Troubled?)

What did you do? (Try to make what was wronged right? Stood frozen? Sick to your stomach?)

John and I are experiencing real pain in our lives today. We are recognizing aspects within our marriage where we have failed. Last Wednesday (September 14th) we were sorting through the rubble and feeling very numb by it all - we were feeling helpless. John's heart was so filled with anxiety and distress that I wondered as he began the Bible Study whether he could open his mouth or not. Did you recognize in his voice vulnerability? I bet you did because he was.

I bet many of you understand how John felt.

Do you think you could have shared as honestly as Paul did with us about his frustration and sick to his stomach anxiousness - so much so that he skipped a booked date to address a huge group?

Yet the next verse is astounding:

14. But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

With my background as a long standing pagan, you can guess why I dance around the room when hearing Paul's cry of grateful thanksgiving for a powerful ministry that stands not less than a verse away from his sense of failure, weakness, his frustration and his despair. In one hand he is thanking God for an outstanding ministry and in the other he is expressing his great frustration!

How can he reverse his position so quickly? Everything is not looking pretty to Paul and yet at the same time he is throwing a New York ticker tape parade as if the war had been won²? How can one rejoice in the midst of everything going wrong?

² Paul had experienced the Roman Triumphs, where the conquering general would ride through the streets of Rome in his chariot, preceded by numbers of priests swinging pots of fragrant incense. Behind him would come the captives he had taken, being led to their execution in chains. To the captives, the smell of the incense represented death. For the army and the streets filled with Rome's citizens, the fragrance represented that their life was spared.

Instead of Channel #5 as the corporate sponsor the parade includes a spreading forth of the fragrance of Christ. What ever is Paul referring to when he writes in verses 15-16?

15. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

16. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?

Me the scent of Christ? Don't look so surprised! You too are the bouquet of Christ! The smell of Christ is pleasing to those who are in the process of being saved; the hope and the freedom that Christ can give them. To those who are in the process of dying, the fragrance of Christ in us stinks!

And who is equal to such a task? And who is equal to set people free? (We will find the answer in Chapter 3)

It's a good question and while John will explore what it means to us in Chapter 3, take a minute and reference [Matthew 20:22](#) (New International Version). Jesus is raising the same question with his disciples.

22. "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"
"We can," they answered.

Yes, we can - Not!

In our naiveté we have often answered Jesus' question with, "Sure I can. Bring it on!" However, at first onset of a disturbance we can be found flying under the covers shivering. Like Paul's question, many in prestigious places have asked us, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And we have shouted in chorus, "We are! Because we are Christians living the victorious or triumphant life!"

Well, you might be. I am not living a life of victory. Why, I fall over the slightest obstacles. I find myself caught in my inner doubts. I know great fears and experience paralyzing pain in my heart. Maybe you do too.

So what is wrong with those of us who wobble along? NOTHING! That is because the triumphant life includes anguish, fears, and doubts. Our life is set up to be set side by side with the fragrance of Jesus because we are confident that the God who is within us is able to work his work and do his will that out of our fear, the frustration, and the failure is coming the triumph and victory and the fragrance of Christ.

This fragrance unto life Paul applies to himself

This fragrance unto life Paul applies to himself. How very cool! Have you ever heard of any thing so relevant? The fact that Jesus is alive and can free us and deliver us from our inner torments and pressures, that this is everywhere a fragrance to God of the life of his Son. Wherever Paul went, God could smell the sweetness and beauty of Jesus in what Paul was doing.

The fragrance of life is not like a perfume that fades. We are a fragrance to God of the life of his Son. We cannot put it on and take it off like a coat. Wherever we go God can smell the pleasing and appealing fragrance of Christ in us.

We can change the world

If we are able to embrace this reality - really welcome it with open arms - get ready to change the world. To those who are in the process of being saved we will help them to freedom and life in Christ. For those who are in the process of dying we will arouse anger and opposition.

A commercial paid for and approved by Sinners

A commercial paid for and approved by the sinners or those that may *appear* to be in the process of dying and find your scent disgusting: Please be warned. I was an example of this. Through my pride I stood defiantly against God, rejecting the option for life. Sometimes however, I'd waver and begin to accept only to let the moment pass as I returned to despair, always resisting the supernatural influence and failing to accept the life-giving option. Then I began to submit to the influence of God, allowing some of my fears and pride to be destroyed, and one day the Lord said, "There is no other day." Similarly, C.S. Lewis' conversion was not a thing of ease. Pain was involved

in the conversion process and he was converted "kicking and screaming." (*Surprised by Joy*, page 229.) Some of the pain came because in fixing his faith on God, Lewis also discovered "ludicrous and terrible things about his own character including immense pride and the realization that he must repent and change."

And to the rest of us saved sinners

In another book, Lewis explained why he thought pain is necessary in conversion. In his book *Mere Christianity*, which is the book that brought me before Christ, C.S. Lewis proposes that God will force a Christian to a higher level: putting him into situations where he will have to be much braver, or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of being before. As a card-carrying member of Christ, I personally find this all unnecessary: but that is because I have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing He means to make of me. Suffering, for Lewis and Paul, can make a saint. So be encouraged in your suffering - you are living the victorious life!

What does this all mean?

Our lives do not rest upon our feeble efforts to do something for God, but on His expectation that God is doing something through us, that we can be at the very moment of our frustration being led in triumph by Jesus Christ - *For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.*

2 Corinthians 2:17

23. Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.

I used to think peddling the word of God referred to the people in Christian bookstores that sell peripheral trinkets by making them central or the hawkers at the airport handing out their tracks. But not any more.

I am thinking peddling the word of God refers to high-paying in-demand Bible scholars who imply that Christ changes our human situation where the fragrance is held in something far more impressive - perhaps silver or gold. "Today's animated preachers could then bounce on tiptoes and announce in lulling, breathy tones how

God has turned us into ‘silver chalices’ and ‘golden bowls³.’ Or those of us who preach but never serve the poor. Or those of us who judge the behavior of others while using a superficial, shallow approach to the word of God without ever first looking in the mirror.

.... ***And who is equal to such a task?*** Who is equal to set people free?

³ *Real Christians Don't Dance*, by John Fischer, page 55

Section 2: The Secret of Adequacy
II Corinthians, Chapter 3: 1-6
September 21st

Chapter 3: 1-3

- 1. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?*
- 2. You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.*
- 3. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

Letters of Recommendation

I am presently seeking a leadership position in the workforce, where it is necessary to request previous employers to provide my introductions or letters of recommendations. It makes sense because the potential employer does not know me from any one else whereas my previous employers have had a hand in my successes. But don't you think it rather odd that the good citizens of Corinth are requesting letters of recommendation from Paul? Certainly Paul is a well-known man amongst them, having lead them to Christ.

Paul's response is basically, "You have got to be kidding! What more proof do you need than your very lives?"

The Corinthians stand as the best letter of recommendation anyone could hope for, written "by Christ on our hearts" ("our" being Paul and his team). "Unlike Moses who delivered God's message on stones, God did the work: He wrote it on your hearts, and the ink he used was the Holy Spirit. We were merely the postal clerks." (Marti Fischer paraphrase)

It was important to Paul that the Corinthians understood that the changes that had occurred in their lives from bondage to freedom were happening because Christ had changed them - not Paul. Paul clearly says he is just a witness to the Lord's forgiveness

and change in the Corinthian citizens. (Would it be that in our modern times we lent credit to Christ and his work in us while insisting that nothing came from us.)

It is Christ who changes lives, heals a hurting heart, touches a lonely spirit, and restores what once we thought could never be made right. It is their changed lives that are all the recommendation Paul needs with people in the marketplace recognizing the visible evidence.

This moves Paul to go on and answer the question he had asked in Chapter 2. Christ, he said, leads us in triumph. He saw himself as the commanding general, marching in triumph through the streets of Rome, having won great victories everywhere he went. In another beautiful figure of speech, he said that his ministry was like a bottle of perfume, the fragrance of which was spreading all through the world -- the sweetness and fragrance of Jesus Christ himself. So Paul's question continues to be, "Who is equal to such tasks? Who is sufficient for these things? Where do you get the ability to have that kind of effect upon those around you?"

The Answer: Chapter 3, Verse 4

4. Such confidence we have through Christ before God.

There is nothing wrong with confidence as long as we understand where it comes from. Paul says, "It doesn't come from me. There is nothing coming from us; everything comes from God."

This new confidence or new covenant that Paul talks about is entirely different than anything the world knows anything about. Nothing is coming from me. Everything is coming from God. The evidence - the changes that occur in people's lives - has nothing to do with my natural skills or abilities. Everything is coming from God.

The old covenant is Paul trying to do his best on behalf of God; the new covenant is God doing his best through Paul.

Briefly jot down what the difference is

You are undoubtedly an unusually competent person with extraordinary gifts (or wish you were). You are smart (or you envy those that are). You have a powerful personality (or would give your right arm to be the life of the party). You are simply remarkable (or at least your mother thinks so). Paul was all of this and more (lineage, he tithed, never broke rules, a part of the ruling body of the Jews, morally above reproach, and blameless). Yet he considered this all for not - worthless.

Take a few seconds and consider what it is that you offer when introducing yourself:

Now ask yourself, “Does this calling card I offer measure up to Paul’s, who counted everything as worthless if it did not come from God?”

If you want to change lives as Paul did, to really upset whole communities and start people in new directions, to give them liberty and freedom in the midst of guilt and oppression, aren't you going to have to learn what Paul learned - that it is nothing coming from you, but everything coming from God. God alone can do God's work. If there is no sense of dependence on him for that purpose, it is a wasted, useless effort.

Jot down as honestly as you can what you think of these considerations.

What are your objections?

What are your “So what’s?”

What are your grievances?

Where is the push-pull?

What will it take to understand that it is not up to you anymore?

How do you feel when thinking the Lord of all Lords, the Christ, the holy Messiah is working through you - and that it is far better than anything you have come up with yet?

The Old and New Covenant

The Old Covenant required clauses - standards to achieve. Develop self-confidence and work very hard. Measure up to the standard of expectation - and, if you want to be any one, exceed all expectations.

The new covenant says, "Just show up; present yourself. God will work through you, and what God demands, God himself will achieve, using you as the instrument of it.

The Downside to the New Covenant:

1. You will never get the credit for anything you do because it is God working through you (and sometimes in spite of you).
2. You can never boast, "Look what I did!"
3. It is God alone.

The Upside to the New Covenant:

1. God has made us competent to be ministers of the New Covenant (and there is not a special class of individuals that are set aside for this ministry).
2. He lives with us.
3. We are His.
4. We have access to his power, wisdom, strength, and energy.
5. The Spirit instructs us so that our eyes are opened.
6. He forgives us our sins right away at the very beginning.
7. We are being constantly washed and cleansed and forgiven of God all through our lives.
8. Our whole motivation and outlook on life changes.

Chapter 3: 6

6. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The law (what Paul calls “the letter”) is good. (Think about “law” or “letter” not only as rules or standards like the Ten Commandments, or the Golden Rule, but as a principle of bettering yourself by doing certain things and not doing other things.) The law approaches us with rules: what we should do and what we should not do. And as human nature goes, we do not like the law telling us what to do. In fact we have a sense of rebellion against the law.

Jot down some thoughts about the time you considered or went ahead and were unlawful.

How did you feel at first?

How about a little later?

What did you do to get rid of or keep the feeling?

The Spirit is also good, and so much better for us than the law because He approaches us within our hearts. We welcome the story of how Christ died for us instead of turning away. We embrace His freedom to quickly forgive us. In equally fast time, He unties the bonds of guilt - both the immediate and the past. And in His love He embraces us - draws us into Himself - and wraps us in His robes of righteousness.

Write a short memory reminder of a time when Christ wrapped you in His robes of righteousness and encircled you in His reconciliation. Take your time on this request because we often have to work our way through our closets full of nonsense.

Having a hard time finding yourself under His robes with just your nose sticking out from an opening in the material near His chest? It is understandable. We spend most of our lives performing for our mates, our bosses, our community, and our churches.

But I want you to go where the Father is and He is on the other side of the cross, where He smells the fragrance of His son in you. He is telling you He loves you and that He approves of you - just the way you are. You are His family and He loves you more than anyone else. He cherishes you.

Listen as He whispers in your ear that you are welcome to serve Him in whatever way your heart delights in doing. Truly. No strings attached.

He breathes, "I love you my very own child, the love of my life with all that I am as God. Come, peak out from under my sleeve and see what I see. Look and you will know where I am. Is there a place that you would like to join me? Just tell me where. I will take you with me and as a result, people will know that I am God.

The New Covenant - Nothing from us and everything from God - now that is Good News.

Section 3: Righteousness means being fully accepted, having a sense of being approved by God, of being honored and cherished by Him - The Greater Glory of the New Covenant

**II Corinthians, Chapter 3: 7-11
Getting ready for September 28th**

- 7. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was,*
- 8. will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?*
- 9. If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!*
- 10. For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.*
- 11. And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!*

Getting ready for September 28th

- 1. In your opinion, what is the Glory of the Old Covenant? What makes us attracted to it?*
- 2. Why did it fade?*
- 3. In your life can you think of a time when you shined - when you were on top of it all? Perhaps in sports or business, when you made a great impression.*
- 4. Who got the credit? Who was glorified?*
- 5. Was it sustainable? Why or why not?*

- 6. *Have you ever felt like you have not measured up to what God expects of you or a friend expects or a family member wants of you?***

- 7. *Would you describe this feeling as a ministry of condemnation? Why? Are you trying to do it on your own resources, by your own efforts?***

What if God gave you a standing of worth. You wouldn't have to earn it; you get to start with it. God tells you already in the new covenant, "I have loved you, I have forgiven you, I have cleansed you. You are my dearly beloved child. I intend to use you; you are part of me; your life is significant. There is nothing more you can add to that.

Now, on that basis, with the security of that acceptance, go back to your work - go with a sense of approval and security.

God is making us able, not from ourselves, but from Him. If we understand this, life will never be the same again. If we are aware of how many times we have been confused and blinded by the attitudes of the world around us which continually brainwashes us to believe that it is something lying within us that is the secret of true power.

Imagine what our lives would be like if we understood this truth, believed it, and, counted on God to be our ability to change and heal and restore and forgive - the results of Christ manifested through us.

I say bring it on! What about you?