

Adult Teaching Resources

June 3, 2018



Season After Pentecost: The Perils of Pauline ... Thinking (May 27-July 8)

2 Corinthians 4:5-12 (RCL 4:5-12) – “Treasure Sharing”

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:5 (RCL 4:13-5:1) – “We Don’t Lose Heart”

2 Corinthians 5:6-17 (RCL 5:6-10 [11-13], 14-17) – “By Faith, Not Sight”

2 Corinthians 6:1-13 – “Living Oxymorons”

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Treasure Sharing

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.” 2 Corinthians 4:7

There is an old tongue-in-cheek saying about church and people. It goes, “church would be easier if it wasn’t for the people.” Sadly, there is a lot of truth in that statement. People, the relationships, the baggage, the expectations, and the demands we bring, can make doing and being church difficult.

Paul experienced this truth with his relationship with the church at Corinth. He desired for the church to keep its mission and relationships moving in the godly direction. His words not only speak to the ancient church, but to our own congregations right now.

Opening

After everyone arrives, ask them to think of the one person in their life who most modeled Christ-like behavior through words and actions. Give time to think, then ask for volunteers to name their person. As names are shared, write the names on the board.

When the list is completed, then ask volunteers to share how their person modeled Christ. Encourage everyone to think in specific terms and share real examples.

Give the group time to reminisce and share before moving on to the passage.

Reading the Bible

Why have Paul and Titus not lost heart? (they are engaged in this ministry)

What do they refuse to do? (they refuse to practice cunning or falsify God’s word.)

Who has blinded the minds of the unbelievers? (the god of this world) What does the god do? (he keeps them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus)

What do Paul and Titus proclaim? (they proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and themselves as slaves for Jesus’ sake)

What did God say? (Let light shine out of darkness) What has God done? (shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ)

Reading the Bible *continued*

Where is the treasure? (in clay jars) Where does it come from? (not from us, it comes from God)

How are Paul and Titus affected? (vv 8-10)

What happens while they live? (they are always given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that life in Jesus is visible)

Making Connections

What do you see or experience in your church that gives you hope? What role do you play in that situation?

Who do you know who has heard the truth about Christ, but still struggles with it? What are their struggles? How are you trying to help them with a better understanding?

What reasons can you give why you think the gospel message remains veiled for some people? How can you bring light to them?

What do you think is God's business? How is God's business different from our business? How is God's business the same as ours?

What does it mean to have the light of Christ shine through you? What have you known that to happen for you?

Have you ever suffered or been persecuted because of your faith? Share that experience.

Our Lesson Writer says, "Paul and his close companions were willing to face the possibility of death in order that others could witness the presence of Christ and come to have life."

How far are you willing to go in order that others might witness the presence of Christ and have life?

So What?

Our Lesson Writer poses a personally, challenging question at the end of the lesson. Ask your group to consider this question and share how they can respond.

The question is, "What are some ways in which we, through our own bodies of clay, can show others the life-giving light of Christ?"

Write their responses on the board. If it would be helpful, write the person's name or initials next to their suggestion.

Spend some time discussing the opportunities and challenges we have before us to show others what someone else (the Opening) showed to us. What does it mean to know that it is our turn to share with someone else?

The Challenge

This week, live out what your group just discussed in “So What.” What can, and will, you do to show someone else the life-giving light of Christ? Take time before you leave class to write down three things you commit to do in the coming week.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for putting people in my life who have taught and shown me your love, your light, and your grace. We pray that as we have the opportunities to show you to others, we will have the awareness, the knowledge, and the courage to show others who you are in a way that make sense and makes a difference in their life. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

A strategic location—Being at the narrowest point of an isthmus between two seas, Corinth was an ideal location for trade. Goods could be brought into the port of Cenchreae through the Saronic Gulf from the Mediterranean side of the isthmus, then off-loaded and carted



across the narrow land corridor on a stone track called the *diolkos*, then loaded onto other ships at the port of Lechaion and sent into the Corinthian Gulf. This allowed for faster and safer access to western ports than sailing around the entire Peloponnesian peninsula. Some smaller ships could be put on a wheeled cart and dragged across entirely.

A canal was dug in the 19th century, allowing relatively small ships to sail directly through the isthmus (see photo).

Corinthian history—The Corinth that Paul knew was built upon the ruins of an ancient Greek city called Ephyra. As a leading Greek city, it had survived much of the Roman world’s expansion including the Peloponnesian Wars (461-446, 431-404) and the Corinthian War (395-387), but it was destroyed in 146 BCE by the Roman proconsul Lucius Mummius, who razed the city, killed the men, and sold the women and children into slavery. Mummius did such a thorough job that Corinth lay in ruins for a century, until Julius Caesar ordered that it be rebuilt in 44 BCE and populated it at first with former slaves who were granted both freedom and land as a reward for military service.

Corinthian immigrants—The edict of Claudius mentioned in Acts 18:2 is also known from other sources including the writings of Josephus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius. Josephus, a Jewish-Roman historian who would have been a contemporary to the event, said the edict took place in the ninth year of Claudius’ rule. Suetonius, who was born after the events, researched and wrote biographies of Rome’s first 12 emperors.

He said of Claudius: “He expelled from Rome the Jews constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.” (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25; from Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* [Liturgical Press, 1983], 138–39).

Scholars typically assume that “Chrestus” is an alternate spelling for “Christus,” but it is not clear whether Claudius was concerned with Jews who were agitating against Christ-followers, or if the work of Christian missionaries had led to an uprising.

Digging Deeper *continued*

A Corinthian date—Paul’s first visit to Corinth is the most securely dated encounter in his known missionary career. The account in Acts 18 says that Paul was brought before proconsul Lucius Junius Gallio (Acts 18), a brother of the famed rhetorician and writer Seneca the Younger. An inscription found in Corinth independently dates Gallio’s rule to either 50-51, 51-52, or possibly 52-53 CE. When Paul was brought before Gallio on charges of unlawful activity, Gallio dismissed the charges, showing little regard for the concerns of the Jews (Acts 18:12-17).

The Corinthian church—The word Paul uses for church is *ekklesia*, the root of our English words “ecclesiology” (the study of the church) or “ecclesiastical” (relating to the church or its clergy). The word, which means “gathering,” was typically used in Greek versions of the Old Testament to translate *qahal*, used to describe the congregation of Israel during the wilderness wandering or in gatherings at the temple.

The church at Corinth was known for dissension, sniping, and misbehavior by the membership. When I was in seminary, professor Malcolm Tolbert once quipped that it must have been a Baptist church, because the only way for a church to get in such bad shape was to have total freedom, and to totally misuse it!

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Why was Corinth such an important city?

Aside from its strategic location as a commercial center, Corinth played other roles as a city of major importance during the first century.

Politically, Corinth was the center of Roman government for the province of Achaia, giving it significance that stretched far beyond the city limits.

Economically, Corinth was considered the “Fourth City” of the Roman Empire, and thus a prosperous place where wealthy and influential people would be commonplace.

Ethnically, Corinth was an eclectic, cosmopolitan city, no longer Greek, but settled by many former Roman soldiers who were given land, along with immigrants from all over, including Jews from the diaspora. The city was known as a rowdy place, famous for its immorality and wantonness. The phrase “to Corinthianize” has been used to mean “to become immoral.”

Religiously, Corinth harbored a variety of belief systems, including adherence to the old Greek gods, to the Roman gods, mystery religions, Judaism, and an incipient form of Gnosticism that would prove to be a serious threat to the early church. Idolatry was common, and citizens were encouraged to participate in the imperial cult and worship the Roman emperor. Temples to Poseidon-Neptune (Greek and Roman names for the same god), Aphrodite-Venus, Demeter-Ceres and Kore-Persephone were established, along with temples to Apollo and Asklepius. Eastern and Egyptian deities also had adherents in the city. Thus, Christians in Corinth had to contend with many well-established and very tempting religions. Issues raised in the letter provide evidence that rituals of their pagan neighbors had a strong influence on the church’s worship.

These various factors, plus Corinth’s location as a travel hub with easy access to Europe, made the city a particularly strategic one not only in a political and economic sense, but for the spread of the gospel.



The remains of a temple to Apollo, built in a prominent part of Corinth.