

# Adult Teaching Resources

June 24, 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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# Living Oxymorons

## 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

### 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

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“... as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” 2 Corinthians 6:10

For better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health...so long as we both shall live. We recognize those words from our own wedding or from a wedding we have attended. At first glance, the wedding vows are opposites, one way of being vs. a different way of being. They are contradictory – an oxymoron.

Paul lived his life filled with oxymorons. He knew there would be good days and bad days. There would be those who heard him and those who rejected him. He understood the oxymoron was the way of life. Paul was correct – the oxymoron is a part of life. There will be sickness. There will be health.

Paul embraced the frustration of suffering and joy and continued to work with the church at Corinth so they might understand God better.

### Opening

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After everyone arrives, go to the board and ask your group to think of as many oxymorons as they can. An oxymoron is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary: “a combination of contradictory or incongruous words (such as cruel kindness); broadly : something (such as a concept) that is made up of contradictory or incongruous elements”

After you have a good list, ask folks to share when they have lived or experienced each oxymoron. Some might have no connection to the list, while others might be in the middle of the oxymoron. Ask them to share their experience and their awareness of living in oxymoron.

### Reading the Bible

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What does Paul urge the church to do? (not to accept the grace of God in vain)

What does Paul say Jesus did at the acceptable time? (listened)

What does Paul say Jesus did on the day of salvation? (helped)

According to Paul, what is “now?” (the acceptable time, the day of salvation)

## Reading the Bible *continued*

How does Paul describe his approach to ministry and relating to others? (he puts no obstacle in anyone's way)

What have been the challenges Paul has endured with the gospel? (list in v. 4-5)

What have been the benefits Paul has received with the gospel? (list in v. 6-7)

How has Paul been treated by others? (as imposters, as unknown, as dying, as punished, as sorrowful, as poor, as having nothing)

How does Paul see himself in light of those allegations? (as true, as well known, as alive, as not yet killed, as always rejoicing, as making many rich, as possessing everything)

How has Paul spoken to the Corinthians? (frankly, and with hearts wide open)

Where are the restrictions in his message? (only from the hearers)

What does Paul ask for in return from the Corinthians? (they open their hearts wide also)

## Making Connections

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Who in your life, like Paul tried with the Corinthians, has urged you to live more in line with God's way? What did that person do or say? How did you respond?

Our Lesson Writer says, "Paul was convinced that his ministry of calling people to be reconciled with God was the correct way of understanding the gospel and being properly related to God." What do you say is the correct way of understanding the gospel and being properly related to God? Do you agree with Paul? Do you have a different idea?

Paul says he has put no obstacle in anyone's way. When have you had an obstacle put in your way, intentionally or unintentionally that affected your understanding and acceptance of the gospel or a gospel truth? What was the obstacle? What did you do with it?

What attributes and actions do you desire to see from those proclaiming the gospel? How many of those qualities do you see in yourself?

Our Lesson Writer states, "No matter what others thought of him, Paul insisted, he had remained firmly faithful – but he wasn't finished." When it comes to matters of faith and the gospel, how much influence do others have on you? How much do you care what others think about what you say and what you do?

When thinking in terms of faith and the gospel, what do you possess? How does that give you comfort and assurance?

When have you opened your heart to another to share the gospel? Describe that kind of vulnerability. Talk about the other person and their response to your openness.

## So What?

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Form smaller groups of 3-4 in each group. Share these questions and thoughts from our Lessons Writer. Have each group discuss their ideas.

“If you had been a member of the church at Corinth, do you think Paul’s appeal would have worked with you? Would you have been inclined to once again ‘open wide your heart’ to Paul as your spiritual leader?”

As you think about your own church, what words of reconciliation and peace do you think need to be shared? Who should be the speaker? How do you think the words should be shared? How do you think the words would be received?

As you think of yourself in times of conflict, what kind of appeal would work best with you for you to hear the truth? What would need to happen for you to “open wide your heart?”

Give each group time to discuss, then open the conversation to the larger group for discussion, asking volunteers to share their thoughts and ideas.

## The Challenge

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This week, open your heart to hear the truth in unlikely and maybe even uncomfortable places. Get past the obstacles that might be in your way and listen for God’s truth, grace, and love. When you hear it, thank God for that moment and for the message.

## Prayer

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*Loving God, we recognize Paul had a difficult task with telling the truth to the church at Corinth. We confess that we are sometimes like the early believers and would like to shoot the messenger when the message is difficult to hear. Open our hearts to hear the truth and may we all be your messengers to share your word with others. 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.

**Translating v. 1**—As noted in the lesson, v. 1 is subject to different interpretations regarding who Paul considers to be “working together.”

Some translations assume that Paul includes the Corinthians and add the word “we”: the NRSV has “As we work together,” and NET has “Now because we are fellow workers . . . .” The NRSV also adds the words “with him” (not in the text) to indicate that believers work together with God. The NIV 11 takes a different approach, adding the word “God” to its rendering but apparently leaving the Corinthians out: “As God’s co-workers, we urge you . . . .”

**Hardship**—Paul’s catalogue of suffering and hardship in 6:3-10 is the longest, but not the only one in 2 Corinthians.

In 4:8-10, he wrote: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.”

And, 11:23-28 he further highlighted his suffering, as if he were in competition with others: “Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches.”

**Spiritual gifts in action**—Consider Paul’s description of his behavior in vv. 6-7a, a list that sounds like other catalogues of spiritual gifts Gal. 5:22-23 and elsewhere: “by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God . . . .”

Could any of us claim to have demonstrated such virtues consistently, especially in the face of severe trials? Have we remained pure despite temptation and responded rationally rather than emotionally while showing patience and kindness to everyone we meet? Have we maintained a spirit of holiness and showed sincere love through honest speech, trusting in God for help?

## Digging Deeper *continued*

Have we even come close? Would we like to?

**Children**—In 1 Corinthians, Paul had spoken of the Corinthians as his spiritual children, urging them to imitate him: “I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me” (1 Cor. 4:14-15).

## 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.

### What does Paul mean when warning the Corinthians not to receive God's grace in vain?

In v. 1, Paul appeals to the Corinthians that they receive him as one who is Christ's fellow-worker, that they not "accept the grace of God in vain." What does he mean by that?

In the Word Biblical Commentary, Ralph Martin reviews several possible ways to look at it.

One option is to imagine that Paul is thinking of someone, like the rocky soil in Jesus' parable of the seed and the soils (Mark 4:1-9, 13-20; Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23; Lu. 8:4-8, 11-15). There the idea is that some people receive the gospel and spring up quickly, but when difficulties arise, they fall away. In this case, one might say they had accepted God's grace "in vain." Martin judges that this is unlikely, largely because the verb for "to receive" is in the aorist tense, indicating conversion at an earlier time.

Another option is that Paul imagined people who had accepted the gospel, but later turned away and lost their salvation. This doesn't seem to jive with other places where Paul seems confident that when God begins a good work in someone, God will carry it through.

Yet a third option sees the statement as being addressed to people in general, rather than to the Corinthian believers in particular. In this case, it's an appeal to everyone not to reject salvation. The problem, again, is that the verb for "have accepted" or "have received" implies that they have already received salvation.

What seems most likely, Martin concludes, is that since Paul quickly moved to the subject of judgment in v. 10, he was concerned that there was little evidence of salvation in the Corinthians' lives. In other words, they had been saved, but didn't act or live like it, so their faith could be thought of as "in vain." Paul had reached a gospel of reconciliation, which he considered to be the true gospel of Christ. When they refused to be reconciled to him, he saw this as a denial of the very gospel they had received. In this case, they would have received salvation in vain, for it made no difference in their daily living. As Martin put it, "Having learned that Jesus died for them, they had not yet died to themselves. And this failure to die was partially exhibited in their failure to have stood by Paul." (Adapted from Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 40 of Word Biblical Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 165-166].)

How do you think this phrase should be interpreted? More importantly, if Paul had been writing to you and your church, could he have charged you with accepting the gospel in vain?