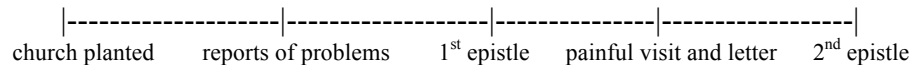


THE WHOLE BIBLE: 2 Corinthians – Ephesians

2 CORINTHIANS

- many questioned if Paul could be an apostle if suffers so much
- most personal of Paul's letters – full of anguish and sorrow
- central theme: suffering and weakness in the Christian life

Timeline of Corinthian Church



2 Corinthians 4:7-12

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

The cross-shaped life

- [1] God alone receives the glory [2] life through death

[1] God alone receives the glory

- our weakness (“jars of clay”) demonstrates the power of God
- v. 7 – “to show that power belongs to God and not us”

[2] Life to others, death for self

- only self-giving love produces life
- we live out suffering love of Jesus (carry “death” in our body)
- so that others might know the “life of Jesus”

This is a challenging teaching – cross-shaped life

- we don't want to suffer | we want a safe, comfortable life
- but “whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it” (Luke 17:33)
- strange joy of suffering for sake of Christ

GALATIANS

- first writing of New Testament | about 12-15 years after crucifixion
- crisis of false teachers – circumcision as necessary for salvation

Acts 15:1

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Paul calls this a “different gospel”

Galatians 1:6-9

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Freedom in Christ

Galatians 5:1-14

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. ² Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³ I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴ You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

⁷ You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

⁸ This persuasion is not from him who calls you. ⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰ I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. ¹¹ But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

¹² I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

What is Christian freedom?

- freedom from slavery to the law – “yoke of slavery”

(1) Slavery of Jewish ceremonial laws

- circumcision, dietary laws, clean laws, feasts (3 major)
- 3 categories of law: civil, ceremonial and moral

(2) Slavery of moral performance

- v. 4 – “justified by the law”
- creates anxiety, guilt and a burdened life

Gospel frees us from the law, for the law

- v. 6 – “faith working through love”
- two critical errors: *legalism* and *antinomianism*

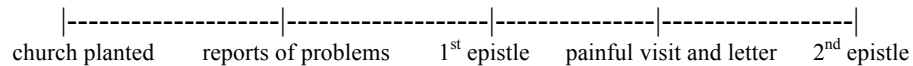
- v. 13-14 – don’t abuse your freedom in Christ
- not just freedom *from* law, but freedom *to* love

Notes

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

- many questioned if Paul could be an apostle if suffers so much
- most personal of Paul's letters – full of anguish and sorrow
- what is at stake is nothing less than the gospel
 - worldly values of power and success vs. gospel values of weakness and suffering

Timeline of Corinthian church | 5 year period



- Paul plants church (Acts 18) – 1.5 years
- receives report of problems (1 Cor. 1:11)
 - divisions, immorality, false teachers who reject Paul
- writes 1 Corinthians | but mixed reception
- personal painful visit (2 Cor. 2:1)
- followed up with a “tearful letter”
- finally, 2 Corinthians

Central theme – suffering and weakness in the Christian life

- questioning: how Paul be apostle if his life is full of troubles?
- Paul's response: cross is not just how we are saved
 - but a pattern of life we live as followers of Jesus

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

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The cross-shaped life

- [1] God alone receives the glory
- [2] life through death

[1] God alone receives the glory

- our weakness – “jars of clay” (fragile, coarse vessels)
- demonstrates the power of God
 - v. 7, “to show that power belongs to God and not us”
 - versus a life of success and strength, the glory goes to us

[2] Life to others, death for self

- only through the death of Christ, life to his people
- only self-giving love produces life
- true in all relationships | illustration: raising a child

v. 10 – “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies”

- we testify to suffering love of Jesus through our suffering
- our suffering makes our gospel witness authentic and powerful

This is a challenging teaching – cross-shaped life

- we don't want to suffer | we want a safe, comfortable life
- but “whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it” (Luke 17:33)
- 1 Peter 4:12 – “do not be surprised at the fiery trial, as though something strange were happening to you”
- 2 Tim. 3:12 – “all desire a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”
- strange joy of suffering for sake of Christ

Introduction to Galatians

- first writing of New Testament
 - only about 12-15 years after crucifixion of Jesus
 - all essential elements of Christianity – deity, resurrection
- written by Paul in urgency to address crisis of false teachers
 - taught that circumcision is necessary for salvation

Acts 15:1

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

What is circumcision?

- cutting off foreskin, typically at 8 days for baby | adult converts
- sign of faith given to Abraham
- distinctive sign for Jewish people | especially in Greek world

- but more than that, symbol for whole Jewish law
- Judaizers teaching necessity of Mosaic law for salvation

Paul calls this a “different gospel”

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⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Not just variations on Christian faith, but counter to Christianity

- a “different gospel” is no gospel at all
- notice very strong language: even if an angel from heaven!
 - let him be accursed!

- if you get the law wrong, you get gospel wrong
- v. 4 – “severed from Christ”

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What is Christian freedom?

- freedom from slavery to the law – “yoke of slavery”
- Jesus – “come to me, all labor and heavy-laden, and take my yoke upon you, for I am gentle and lowly of heart”

2 layers to the slavery of the law:

(1) Slavery of Jewish ceremonial laws

- v. 3 – every man who accepts circumcision obligated to keep whole law
- circumcision, dietary laws, clean laws, feasts (3 major)

Distinguish from moral law – applicable for all times

- 3 categories of law: civil, ceremonial and moral

Ceremonial laws were burdensome obligations

- exactitude and multitudinous specificity | rabbinic interpretation
- but also, separation from people

Issue of table fellowship (Galatians 2:11-12)

- under pressure from Judaizers, Peter kept kosher
- this meant separation from eating with Gentile believers
- in effect, this made Gentile believers feel like 2nd-class Christians
- gospel is reconciliation | anti-gospel separates and divides

(2) Slavery of moral performance

- Judaizers were teaching “justified by the law” (v.4)
- circumcision is attitude – standing with God b/c moral performance
- this creates anxiety, guilty and burdened life
 - never be sure you are good enough
- salvation by law is motivated, not by love, but fear or pride
 - touchy, insecure, pride, discouraged, weary

v. 6 – “in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything”

- neither “moral exertion” nor “moral failure” matters in salvation
- neither religion nor lack of religion counts
- because saved by grace alone
- good behavior doesn’t make right with God
- bad behavior doesn’t make you more lost and hopeless
- all equally lost; and all equally able to be saved
- all matters is Christ

v. 6 – “faith working through love”

- two critical errors: *legalism* and *antinomianism*
- constantly veering in one direction or other
- faith alone, but not a faith that is alone
- gospel faith always produces love (which is essence of law)
- love is not mechanistic or merely behavioral
- gospel freedom gives new motivations and new heart
 - deep gratitude, profound joy and overflowing love

v. 13-14 – don’t abuse your freedom in Christ

- “free from law” misleading | sounds like free from restraints/obligations
- but Xian freedom not mean – lawlessness or freedom from holiness
- v. 13 – “do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh”
- but rather “serve one another through love” (v. 13)
- Christian freedom doesn’t make you less obligated, but more

Two aspects of Christian freedom

- freedom from guilt of sin (burdened conscience)
- freedom to love | free to be who created to be
 - this freedom creates a supernaturally changed heart
 - obedience becomes joy; sin becomes repugnant

Do Christians have to obey the law or not? | yes!

- not as a way to win merit with God
- but as a way to please God
 - gospel makes us want to obey

Gospel frees us from the law, for the law