

# Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians - Catherine Taylor

## Contexts:

### *The City:*

- \* Since the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, famous for artistic and architectural innovations, including the invention of black figure pottery.
- \* Administrative and trade center.
- \* Center of Aphrodite cult prostitution.
- \* Known as a city focused on selfish pleasures. I am picturing Los Vegas here.
- \* Diverse population included Romans, Italian Jews, Greeks, people of Asia Minor. There were also transient populations of athletes and their spectators, philosophers, industrialists and artists. When I think spectators, I think Manchester United and Taylor Swift types.

### *The Christian Congregation:*

- \* See diverse population above.
- \* People used to the cult of Aphrodite.
- \* People accustomed to a very different concept of power than Jesus taught.
- \* People accustomed to a very different concept of love than Paul taught and lived.
- \* People who loved Paul.
- \* .... and were trying to follow his teachings.

### *Paul*

- \* Knew in the cells of his own memory the taste of the misuse of power.
- \* and remorse
- \* Focused on the creation of a community that replicates Heaven.
- \* Knew personally what it was like to have an agape loving community rescue him.
- \* Concerns about some of the effects of his first letter to them.

Me

I had not spent much time studying 2 Corinthians before this assignment. Since it would have been read aloud, I have listened to the book several times (NIV version). I have read it in the First Nations Version. By the time we get to the lesson I will be home and have studied it also in the New English Translation.

What interests me at this point is what it would have been like to stand at a meeting and hear it. The whole letter takes only 39 minutes to read aloud. I've experienced longer sermons.

What I would like us to try, in this discussion, is to share our thoughts from our own minds, our own understanding, and our own experience.

If I was giving my overview, I would say Paul is letting Corinthian Christian believers know he still loves them; he knows he was plain spoken but only because he cares for them; he would like them to be part of the community of Heaven; he would like them to trust him; and he would like to give them some ideas about ways they can have a healthy spiritual journey while living...well...where they live.

.....

1. The first section greeting (1; 1-3) talks about a kind, peaceful and merciful Father.

Why do you think Paul began this second letter with that opening?

2. Paul talks about his sufferings as the reason he has not come back. "I don't want to sadden you with *another* painful visit"

What do you think was his intent in writing this?

3. I was struck by 2:4

What is your reaction? Why do you think he wrote that to these church members?

4. Chapter 3 - The indigenous translation shifts the word most of us read as **covenant** to "**Peace treaty**". It helps me see the concepts from a slightly different angle. I must admit here, that I don't think there was anything particularly wrong with the Mosaic covenant (except for all those sacrifices which would have been very very difficult for me.) It seems to me that the Spirit of God would have helped the Israelites keep the commandments with generosity of heart in the same way we can follow God these days.

What are your thoughts on what Paul describes as the two covenants or peace treaties?

5. Chapter 5 - And now we come to a discussion of bodies: Paul's own suffering, our bodies being tipis, the new body, living or dying with trust, being a new creation.

What do you think would be the importance of this message in a city where there was a focus on pleasure, prostitutes and athletics?

Why would Paul write this message to this particular congregation?

6. In 7:2 Paul writes *Open your hearts and let us in. We have wronged no one; we have harmed no one.* There is some iteration of this in 7: 11,12

Why do you think he would feel the need to say this?

7. Chapter 8 talks a lot about giving sacrificially – I think of Paul’s focus on building community; in the local church and in having a sense of the larger body of the people who follow The Way. I also think of it as an antidote (the Camino discussion that just popped up about a viper might have triggered the use of this word) to the stresses of being a follower of The Way in Corinth.

Your thoughts?

8. In the last part of the letter Paul takes a chunk of space to talk about himself, the way he thinks, his own spiritual experiences, his own care.

At the end of this particular epistle, why do you think he would take time to do that?

9. What was one verse or section you found particularly interesting? Why?  
I am saving the last 15 minutes of our discussion so each person can have one minute or so.

I am looking forward to seeing you all soon.

Take good care of yourselves for you are valuable and valued.

**Catherine**