

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Week #2 – Adult Bible Study
Study Notes

2 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:18

March 4 & 5 2025

“Nothing that has not died will be resurrected.” C.S. Lewis

1. Paul’s theology becomes crystallized in this second letter. Suffering and death are about transformation and resurrection.
2. The word **Yes** is God’s favorite and most repeated word. In Hebrew it is *Amen*. God is in a constant state of saying yes to all of creation, including us.

2: 14-17

3. There is a sharp change in subject matter and tone of the letter. Paul takes a polemic turn in his confrontation. The radical nature of the break has many scholars believing that 2:14 begins a portion of another letter which a later editor attached to 1:1 – 2:13
4. Paul uses three pictures or images to open his defense
 - Christ has a victorious Roman General and Paul as his captured slave.
 - Second, (the Greek word used for “triumph” here does not include a public display.) Paul is making a point that we are the not the focus of God’s triumph but rather the Gospel message draws people on its own
 - Thirdly, the aroma of the preacher. An Old Testament allusion to sacrifice.
5. Whatever we do in Christian Service, we do only because God has made us into the kind of people we are.
6. Paul shifts once again to his defense. This self-defense continues through most of the remainder of the letter.
7. Paul regularly refused payment from the churches to which he preached. He was then under no pressure to adjust his message to please his hearers.
8. We are then the aroma of Christ to the world. This is a tremendous responsibility, and who is “sufficient for it,” Paul goes on to answer this in the next section.

3:1-18

9. In chapter three Paul contrasts his ministry with that of Moses and the new covenant in Christ with the old covenant mediated by Moses. He probably does this because those who have been troubling the Corinthians have overstressed the Old Testament and understressed the newness of Christ.

10. In verses 1-6 he lays the foundation for his argument by introducing a set of contrasts between
 - The old way with Moses and the new way with Christ
 - And then develops this in the remainder of the chapter.
11. In the ancient world, when people go traveling they often take with them letters written by friends commending them to friends of their friends. Those who were disturbing the Corinthian church had come to it hoping to be accepted on the basis of such letters.
12. Paul sees no need of any such letters for himself; Paul can offer many – the Corinthian Christians themselves.
13. So instead of contrasting the lives of the Corinthians to letters written in ink on paper, he contrasts them with letters chiseled on stone. For he has in mind the original stone tables of the Ten Commandments.
 - This contrast had already appeared in the Old Testament when Jeremiah prophesied that the new covenant would be written on hearts rather than on stone. (31:33)
 - Ezekiel had spoken of the change from hearts of stone to hearts of flesh.
14. Paul then packs into the last words of verse 3 a lot of thought which he draws out later in the chapter. The immediate implications of what he says is that he himself belongs to the new covenant while those he writes against cling too closely to the old.
15. At the end of 2:16 he raises the question “*Who is sufficient for these things:*” The words translated “competent” “competency,” elsewhere in this chapter is the same word translated sufficient in this verse. So the question becomes “*Who is competent for these things.*”
16. Paul is not asserting a confidence in his own ability. He is well aware of his own weakness; he also knows the saving power of Christ. His confidence is therefore before and toward God.
17. Paul makes clear that neither the old or the new covenant began when people approached God and offered God their piety and obedience and asked him in return to give them salvation. In both covenants it is God who makes the approach and offers salvation.
18. If we are to live, life must come not from some code of behavior but from God; Thus it is the Spirit that gives life.
19. Christians who are free are free from the Law of the old covenant, and their justification comes from Christ and not from doing the law. Those who turn to the Lord have then a new hope, a new freedom and a new boldness. Above all they are changed and this change comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
20. Only the power of Holy Spirit can accomplish genuine and lasting change in us. This transformation is one of Paul’s constant themes.

REFLECTIONS

- 1. Reflect on and discuss C.S. Lewis' quote "Nothing that has not died will be resurrected." How does this apply to us today?**
- 2. What role does the idea of transformation and resurrection play in your faith journey today?**
- 3. In what ways do you perceive God saying "yes" to you?**
- 4. Paul provides many images of his relationship with Christ for the reader. What image would you use to describe your relationship?**
- 5. How might we be the "living letters" of recommendation for Christ?**
- 6. Why is our effort for piety and obedience an issue for Paul?**
- 7. Since we are no longer under the law of the old Covenant, what impact does this have with the authority of the Ten Commandments in our lives?**

Notes by The Rev. Janice Y. Cook, Interim Associate Pastor, The Village Church RSF

RESOURCES

1. Second Corinthians, Interpretation, Ernest Best
2. Second Letter to the Corinthians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Roy E. Ciampa and Brian Rosner
3. The Message of 2 Corinthians, The Bible Speaks Today Series, Paul Barnett
4. Feasting on the Word, David Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor Editors
5. C.S. Lewis, Paul and the Theology of Suffering
6. Second Corinthians, New Interpreter's Study