



PACKET 2



# UNFILTERED

REAL FAITH IN A FAKE WORLD

***SMALL GROUP LESSONS***

PACKET 2

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON 5   Don't Lose Heart .....	2
LESSON 6   Treasure in Jars of Clay.....	8
LESSON 7   The Place That's the Best .....	13
LESSON 8   Compelled, Changed, and Commissioned .....	18

# UNFILTERED

REAL FAITH IN A FAKE WORLD

## Don't Lose Heart

*"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart."*

Today we return to 2 Corinthians. Paul wrote this letter after his painful visit to Corinth during which he called the church there to repentance, and so far we have seen the Apostle defend his change of travel plans in light of attacks on his integrity (1:1–2:4). This led him to begin a defense of his Apostolic ministry, for false teachers in Corinth were casting doubt on Paul's vocation because of his suffering and failure to produce the customary letters of recommendation from others for his work. Apparently, these false teachers were saying that Paul could not have been a legitimate Apostle because they believed the Lord would not allow true Apostles to suffer. It also seems they criticized him because they did not find his ministry as glorious as the old covenant. So, Paul set his work in the context of the more glorious new covenant, defending its superiority to the old covenant, and looked to the Corinthians themselves as his letter of recommendation that demonstrated the effectiveness of his work (2:5–3:18; see 10:1–12:10).

With the superior glory of the new covenant ministry established, Paul in today's passage states that having such a ministry explains why he does not "lose heart" (4:1). As commentators note, losing heart does not refer simply to emotional exhaustion or despair; rather, to lose heart in this context means experiencing a weariness of soul that causes one to become slack or derelict in one's duties. The Apostle is noting that the conviction that he labors under as a new covenant minister gives him strength to continue on in the face of much adversity. Thus, we have a demonstration of the importance of getting our theology right in order to enjoy an effective ministry. Being thoroughly convinced that the glory of the new covenant is better than the glory of the old (see ch. 3), Paul could press on in service to Christ even when he went through periods of great trial and it seemed as if his labors were bearing little fruit. Likewise, we will persevere in serving our Savior when we trust that we are in an era of great glory inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

This new covenant ministry of the Apostle Paul was his only "by the mercy of God" (4:1). He did not deserve the high calling given to him by the Lord, and indeed, none of us deserves the honor we have as servants of Christ in the new covenant. We have nothing that has not been given to us freely (1 Cor. 4:7). May we not forget that lest we be destroyed by spiritual pride.

### **Coram Deo Living before the face of God**

John Calvin comments that not losing heart means that "we are not deficient in our duty, so as not to discharge it with fidelity." This is possible only as we remain convinced of the superiority of Christ and the new covenant, and we remember that we have been chosen by grace alone to take part in the ministry of the new covenant.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/daily-study/2021/09/not-losing-heart/>

## ICEBREAKER

What was something you treasured as a kid that would be completely worthless to you today?

## READ IT

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

## EXPLORE IT

1. What reasons does Paul give for why he does not lose heart in verse 1?
2. According to verses 2–4, what actions does Paul reject, and what problem does he identify when the gospel is not received?
3. Who keeps unbelievers blinded from the truth?
4. What has God allowed us to have in verse 6?



## Separate Ways (vs. 2-3)

Paul contrasts his ministry with deceptive practices common in the ancient world, where teachers often used manipulation or rhetorical tricks to gain followers. “Cunning” refers to deceitful methods that distort truth for personal advantage.<sup>4</sup> Paul rejects any approach that treats God’s Word as a tool rather than a trust.<sup>5</sup> This sets a standard not only for leaders but for all believers: faithfulness means resisting the temptation to soften truth, avoid uncomfortable teachings, or present a selective gospel that seeks approval rather than obedience.

7. **Paul warns against manipulative approaches that distort truth to gain approval or influence. In what ways do we see these kinds of approaches show up in Christianity today and why do you think so many people, including believers, are drawn to them?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. **In a day where Christians influenced by social media, cultural pressure, and the desire to keep people happy, what does it practically look like for a church to resist disgraceful or uncommendable approaches to ministry?**

Paul appeals to the conscience, not to image or reputation. Paul’s integrity was visible and testable; his life matched his message.<sup>6</sup> Paul’s confidence was not arrogance but transparency; he had nothing to hide because his ministry was shaped by God’s grace rather than human strategy.<sup>7</sup> This challenges believers today to consider whether their public faith and private life are aligned, and whether their Christianity is marked by honesty rather than performance.

9. **This passage challenges us to examine whether our public faith matches our private life. In what ways can it be tempting to “perform” our Christianity for others rather than live it honestly before God?**

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<sup>4</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Chariot Victor, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Garland, David E. 2 Corinthians. Vol. 29, New American Commentary. B&H Publishing, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> ESV Study Bible. Crossway, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Garland, David E. 2 Corinthians. Vol. 29, New American Commentary. B&H Publishing, 1999.

*Paul shifts the focus away from the messenger and toward spiritual reality. Paul acknowledges that rejection of the gospel is ultimately spiritual, not personal.<sup>8</sup> This protects believers from despair and pride alike; success and rejection are not ultimate measurements of faithfulness. This truth invites Christians to respond to rejection with patience, compassion, and prayer rather than frustration. Paul identifies a real spiritual enemy who works through deception rather than force. Satan blinds people by reinforcing values that oppose God, things like self-reliance, pride, and misplaced trust.*

**10. How does this help us respond when people reject, misunderstand, or dismiss our faith?**

**11. Where do you see the enemy most effectively blinding people today, and how can being aware of that help you stay spiritually alert and dependent on God?**

**12. How does recognizing this spiritual blindness change the way we pray for others? In what ways are you guarding your own heart and mind?**

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<sup>8</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Chariot Victor, 1983.

### **Faithfully (vs. 5-6)**

Paul contrasts self-promotion with Christ-exaltation. Paul rejected any approach that made the messenger more visible than the message. Proclaiming Jesus as Lord means surrendering control, status, and recognition. Paul's language echoes Jesus' own teaching on servanthood.<sup>9</sup> Christian identity is rooted in belonging to Christ, which naturally leads to humility and service toward others. This challenges believers to view everyday responsibilities not as burdens but as opportunities to reflect Christ's character to a lost and needy world.

- 13. In what ways are you serving right now? How do you make sure this act is done with servant heart and not self-promotion? How does viewing yourself as a servant reshape the way you engage with church life, family, or work?**

Paul intentionally echoes Genesis 1, showing that conversion is an act of divine creation, not human achievement. God alone brings spiritual light where darkness once ruled. Salvation is not self-discovery but divine revelation. Paul teaches that God's glory is fully revealed in Jesus, not in religious systems or moral effort. *Christ is both the content and the goal of the gospel which means that spiritual growth depends on continual focus on Christ's person and work.*<sup>10</sup>

- 14. When you think about your own story of coming to faith, where did God begin to open your eyes and bring light where there had been confusion or unbelief?**

- 15. How does keeping Jesus at the center of your faith influence your worship, decisions, and daily priorities? What things need to increase/decrease right now to make this a reality?**

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<sup>9</sup> Hughes, R. Kent. 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness. Preaching the Word Series. Crossway, 2006. *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*



Recently, I visited a pottery store, looking for a special gift. Marveling at the beautiful pieces crafted by local artisans, I quickly found the perfect item—some golden-glazed, wood-fired mugs.

As I left the store, a sign on a small shed caught my attention: “Tired and Flawed Pots.” I chuckled to myself, appreciating the honesty of whoever posted the sign.

At first glance, the pottery in the shed looked similar to the pieces inside the store. But when I looked closer, I noticed these vessels were chipped, misshapen or imperfect in some way. For whatever reason, the potter had deemed them unworthy of a place in the main store.

I sometimes wonder if God sees me that way. Am I too tired, flawed and weak to be valued by Him? When my failings and sinful nature frustrate me, I’m tempted to believe the lie that I’m not good enough or that He will put me on the shelf in the shed.

But I’m learning the opposite is true.

In the ancient world, clay jars were symbolic of human weakness. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he reminds us that God chooses clay jars to fill with His treasure — the Good News of Jesus Christ:

*“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).*

As followers of Jesus:

1. Each of us is a clay jar.
2. Each of us has this treasure — the power of the gospel.
3. The power of the treasure belongs to God, not us.
4. God shows His power through us, the clay jars.

Paul’s words encourage us to be content with our weaknesses and hardships, even boasting of them.

God told Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,”* so Paul said, *“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10, ESV).*

Friend, if you’re feeling weak and discouraged, remember this truth:

God has given you His treasure in your weakness, and He’ll shine His power through it. Your weakness may be the very thing God will use to bring others to Him.

We can choose to bring our weaknesses to Jesus in prayer instead of becoming frustrated by them or letting them trip us up. When our focus is on sharing the treasure, not the clay jar, those around us will see the surpassing power of God.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <https://proverbs31.org/read/devotions/full-post/2024/12/06/> What’s something valuable you own that’s kept in a very ordinary or unimpressive container

## ICEBREAKER

What's something valuable you own that's kept in a very ordinary or unimpressive container?

## READ IT

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–18

## EXPLORE IT

1. What does Paul mean by “treasure” in verse 7?
2. What are the “jars of clay” meant to represent?
3. According to verses 8–9, what four hardships does Paul list?
4. What does Paul say is being revealed through their suffering (v. 10–11)?
5. How does Paul connect suffering to the spread of grace (v. 15)?
6. What contrast does Paul draw between what is seen and unseen?
7. How does Paul describe the length of present suffering compared to future glory?



11. How does Paul's description of our suffering as "this light momentary affliction" both challenge and comfort us?
12. In what ways does focusing on what is unseen shape how we name and endure the real pain we are experiencing right now?
13. What are some "seen" things that tend to dominate our attention?

What are the "unseen" things Paul wants us to focus on?

## A Glorious Perspective

So don't lose heart!

Paul's life is a walking sermon illustration of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He carries the death of Jesus when he is persecuted, and he manifests the life of Jesus when he perseveres through the persecution. And as Paul continues to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus, people come alive.

So he doesn't lose heart. He remembers the glory that is to come ([2 Cor 4:16-18](#)). He knows that our "inner self" is what remains when the "outer self" is completely wasted away. The "inner self" is the first sign of our life beyond the grave, and Paul says that it is being "renewed day by day" by the life of Jesus in us.

From that perspective, our afflictions are light and momentary! But if you reflect on Paul's life, they were not light and momentary at all! He was imprisoned, beaten, stoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, persecuted by his own people, sleepless, starving, and always anxious for the churches he served ([2 Cor 11:23-28](#)).

However, compared to eternity, *these afflictions really are light and momentary!* In fact, they are preparing for us an "eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Our suffering at the moment will achieve glory in eternity. It isn't that suffering somehow *merits* glory. Yet it shares in God's glory. As people hear the gospel, it brings thanksgiving and glory to God—a glory far out of proportion to our suffering.

Glory is what fortifies Paul's motivation to keep doing gospel ministry. Glory motivates him not to lose heart. It is the glory of seeing people come to life as he preaches Jesus Christ as Lord.

We might feel personally fragile. Our ministries might seem ineffective. We might be persecuted to the point of death. But we have the gospel of the New Covenant as our treasure, and as we proclaim Jesus as Lord—new life is created in the midst of our afflictions. And we look forward to the eternal weight of glory that is to come.

So don't lose heart.<sup>12</sup>

### 14. How can our small group encourage and help one another "not lose heart"?

### 15. What is one way you can fix your eyes on what is unseen this week?

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<sup>12</sup> <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dont-lose-heart/>



A pastor once received a letter from a nine-year-old girl that said, “Dear Pastor, I hope to go to heaven someday, but later than sooner. Love, Ellen.”

Out of the mouths of babes! Ellen speaks for almost everyone. We all want to go to Heaven, but later as opposed to sooner. However, as we have come to expect, this isn’t the way Paul thought. Paul hoped to get there sooner rather than later.

Paul’s initial expression is intrinsically positive: “For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling” — a groaning of anticipation. His longing is like the groaning for future glory that he expressed in the three complementary groans in Romans 8...

Do you groan in this body, longing for your heavenly dwelling? I can say that as my understanding of the Scriptures has deepened with the years and therefore my experience of the Spirit, the more I groan for my heavenly dwelling. C. S. Lewis said:

There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven, but more often I find myself wondering whether in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else. . . . It is the secret signature of each soul, the incommunicable and unappeasable want, the thing we desired before we met our wives or made our friends or chose our work, and which we shall still desire on our deathbeds when the mind no longer knows wife or friend or work.<sup>13</sup>

## ICEBREAKER

**What are some of the legends that have been imagined about Heaven?**

## READ IT

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–10**

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<sup>13</sup> Huges, R. Kent. Preaching the Word, Article: More Beyond (2 Corinthians 5:1–10). 2012.

## EXPLORE IT

1. What metaphor does Paul use for our earthly physical body in verse 1?
2. In verse 2, what does Paul say we are doing while in our current "dwelling"?
3. Verse 7 provides a famous contrast; what do we walk by, and what do we NOT walk by?
4. Whether at home or away, what is the specific goal or "aim" mentioned in verse 9?
5. What determines what each person receives at the judgment described in verse 10?

## APPLY IT

### ***The Intermediate State***

This is one of the Bible's clearest teachings on the intermediate state—that is, the period of time between a Christian's death and the return of Christ. This is the time when a Christian is in the awkward position of not having a body, and this awkwardness is what Paul explores in this passage for the Corinthians' encouragement. And yet even this intermediate state is not Paul's main point but a reality he raises in the course of talking about something much better: our final resurrection body. Throughout the passage Paul uses the two images of houses and clothing. His overarching point is that every successive stage in a Christian's experience is superior to the one we leave behind: earthly life, then the intermediate state, then final resurrection.<sup>14</sup>

6. Paul compares our bodies to a tent. What are the characteristics of a tent, and why is that such a powerful metaphor for our earthly lives?

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<sup>14</sup> Dane C. Ortlund. ESV Expository Commentary. Article: 2 Corinthians 5:1–10. Crossway, 2020.

7. When you feel the groaning of physical exhaustion or sickness, how should the promise of an eternal building change your perspective on your current body?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Do you find yourself truly longing for your heavenly dwelling, or have you become too comfortable in your earthly tent? What are some real life examples of each approach?

### ***The Guarantee of the Holy Spirit***

The proof of God's unilateral initiative is the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. But we must be careful (as in 1:22) to understand what this Greek word for "guarantee" (*arrabōn*) means. This is more than a promise. It is not so much something said as something done. The "guarantee" is not a verbal pledge but the actual beginning of the thing promised. "Down payment" gets at the idea. It is similar conceptually to Paul's language of Christ's resurrection as the "firstfruits" (1 Cor. 15:20, 23); that is, the first ingathering of a single harvest. Paul uses the word *arrabōn* just three times (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14), and in all three texts the point is that the Spirit is the beginning experience here and now of the life of the age to come. The superlative joy of the new earth is warm, intimate, restored fellowship with God. In the Spirit that fellowship has already begun.<sup>15</sup>

9. What does it mean for the Holy Spirit to be a guarantee or down payment? How have you experienced the Holy Spirit's presence in your own Christian walk?

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

**10. Read Jesus' words in John 14:16-17. What advantages do you have in life over those in the world?**

**11. How can you practically lean on the Holy Spirit as your guarantee when you feel uncertain about your future?**

### ***Eternal Perspective in Pleasing Jesus***

My three-year-old golden retriever, Daisy, provides me with a canine example of the desire to please because that is all my dog wants to do. Daisy dutifully watches me and listens for my voice inflections or gestures that indicate my pleasure. Her posture seems to say, "Just tell me what you want and I'll do it!" Daisy doesn't bark. She doesn't jump up. She doesn't paw the door or screen to get out. She doesn't steal food, and she doesn't beg. She just stares at the door until I am overcome with guilt. Daisy worships me...

Daisy isn't very smart. She doesn't understand abstractions. She doesn't think much beyond her toys and her next meal and how to get a scratch between the ears. She can't read. She has no eschatology — no doctrine of the future, of resurrection, of judgment and reward. Daisy's Plus Ultra is the next dog biscuit. But though she has no doctrine of future reward, she wants to please her master.

How much more we should want to please Christ Jesus, our Master. We understand that he is eternal God, that he loved us so much that he died for us, that he was resurrected on the third day, that he has prepared a resurrection body for us, that he is going to take us to himself for all eternity, that the Plus Ultra is not a biscuit but the immeasurable "riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). And this understanding ought (and must!) make us resolve that "whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him" (v. 9).<sup>16</sup>

**12. We walk by faith, not by sight. What are the biggest sights (distractions or obstacles) in our modern culture that make walking by faith difficult?**

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<sup>16</sup> Huges, R. Kent. Preaching the Word, Article: More Beyond (2 Corinthians 5:1-10). 2012.

**13. How does the reality of a future judgment change how you view good or evil choices that no one else sees?**

**14. If you were to be at home with the Lord today, what unfinished business would you regret leaving behind?**

Christians must by all means make it their main desire to please God. And indeed it cannot but be that the hope of a resurrection and thoughtfulness as to the judgment will awaken in us this desire. On the other hand, the true reason we are so indolent and remiss in duty is that we seldom if ever think of what ought to be constantly kept in remembrance: that we are here but lodgers for a short time, that we may, after finishing our course, return to Christ.<sup>17</sup>

**15. If we lived every day fully believing that an eternal building awaits us, how would our priorities as a small group change?**

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<sup>17</sup> John Calvin. Commentary on 2 Corinthians.



"What is there to live for?" That is a question that fills many hearts, both Christian and non-Christian alike, today. These are times of crisis. We feel them very strongly in this present hour. Many are troubled by the bleak look of the future. Teen-age suicide rates are rocketing as despair spreads. So, many are asking the question, "What is there to live for?" There is a wonderful answer provided in this passage from Second Corinthians 5 which we will be studying today. I hope that many will be helped by it.<sup>18</sup>

Apparently, Paul was compelled by a crazy kind of love. When we read the account of his life, portrayed in his letters and in the book of Acts, we might be tempted to say that the man was crazy. In fact, Paul himself sometimes heard this accusation. As he was recounting the experience of his conversion and his preaching ministry to Jews and Gentiles, Festus interrupted him and said, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind" (Acts 26:24). Of course, Paul was not out of his mind, but it did not mean that the non-Christians he was speaking to would understand this. All his sufferings, trials, and persecutions were intimately connected with his passion to make Jesus Christ known to all nations.

Why would a person work so hard, only to suffer as Paul did? Was he crazy? The answer is that he did it for love. A love like no other had captured Paul: a love that simultaneously set him free and also constrained him. It is this love that also motivates and drives the Christian life—not just Paul's life, but our lives, too—not just for insane apostolic adventures that lead to shipwrecks, snake bites, and beatings, but the everyday stuff of Christian living. The love of Christ both sets us free and constrains us to live for him.

Consider, then, how a Christian is captured by love, freed by love, and constrained by love.<sup>19</sup>

## ICEBREAKER

**What's something people often don't understand about you?**

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<sup>18</sup> Excerpt from 1979 sermon by Ray Stedman, found at: [www.raystedman.org/new-testament/2-corinthians/whats-there-to-live-for](http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/2-corinthians/whats-there-to-live-for)

<sup>19</sup> Casto, Trent. 2 Corinthians (Reformed Expository Commentary) (pp. 204-205). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

## READ IT

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

## EXPLORE IT

1. According to verse 11, what realities does Paul say are shaping his ministry, and how do those realities explain his urgency in persuading others?
2. In verses 12–13, what misunderstanding about Paul’s ministry is he addressing, and how does he respond to those who judge by outward appearances?
3. What does Paul mean when he says “the love of Christ controls us” in verses 14–15, and what specific outcome does that control produce in a believer’s life?
4. How does Paul describe the change that takes place in how believers view people once they are “in Christ” (vv. 16–17)?
5. How does Paul describe the tone of God’s message to the world through His ambassadors (v. 20), and why is that significant?
6. How does verse 21 summarize the heart of the gospel message that Paul is persuading others to receive?



Here again is the second great motive in the life of the apostle -- "the love of Christ controls us." Actually it is a word that means constrains us, drives us out, motivates us, and then guides us after we get there, that sets the limits to what we should and what we should not do. That, he says, comes from the sense that Christ loves him. ... He also says he has learned that the death of Christ freed him from the need to live for himself. I do not know anything more relevant to today than that statement.<sup>20</sup>

**10. What does it look like, practically, to live *for Christ* rather than merely adding Christ onto an already self-directed life?**

**11. In what areas of life are you most tempted to define freedom as doing what you want rather than living for the One who died for you?**

His opponents were fixated on the outward appearance of the man and his ministry, while Paul's focus was on the heart. Paul had once evaluated people, and even Jesus, "according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16). But not anymore. In the following verses, he will show how evaluating a minister or ministry according to outward appearances is a foolish and empty endeavor. For Paul, what a man is is far more important than what he appears to be.<sup>21</sup>

**12. What does Paul mean by evaluating someone "according to the flesh," and what kinds of measurements does that way of thinking prioritize?**

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<sup>20</sup> Excerpt from 1979 sermon by Ray Stedman, found at: [www.raystedman.org/new-testament/2-corinthians/whats-there-to-live-for](http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/2-corinthians/whats-there-to-live-for)

<sup>21</sup> Casto, Trent. 2 Corinthians (Reformed Expository Commentary) (pp. 205-206). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

- 13. What dangers arise when a ministry or a minister is evaluated primarily by visible success, personality, or presentation?**

To put all of this together, then, we can say that for our sake Christ was treated as a sinner and condemned, so that we might be regarded as righteous and reconciled to God. Paul is using the language of the courtroom here and explaining how God, who is just, could possibly be reconciled with us, who are unjust. What happened at the cross is the answer to the problem of justice. In the words of Charles Hodge:

*Our sins were the judicial ground of the sufferings of Christ, so that they were a satisfaction of justice; and his righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with God, so that our pardon is an act of justice. . . . We are set free by no mere act of sovereignty, but by the judicial decision of the infinitely just.*<sup>22</sup>

- 14. According to this explanation, how can God remain just while declaring unjust people righteous?**

- 15. Why is it important that Paul frames our reconciliation not as God overlooking sin, but as justice being satisfied?**

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<sup>22</sup> Casto, Trent. 2 Corinthians (Reformed Expository Commentary) (p. 223). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Because God has entrusted the message of reconciliation to those who have themselves been reconciled through Christ, Paul concludes that we are ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador is an authorized representative, entrusted and empowered by the one who sends them to speak and act on their behalf. With that authority in view, Paul recognizes that God is making His appeal to the world through those He has reconciled. And so the message we carry is not casual or detached, but urgent and pleading: **“Be reconciled to God.”**

**16. Why do you think Paul describes the gospel appeal as urgent and pleading rather than neutral or detached?**

**17. How can believers hold together humility (we are only representatives) and boldness (we speak with God’s authority) without falling into fear or arrogance?**

**18. In what ways might seeing yourself as an ambassador change how you approach everyday conversations, relationships, or moments of influence?**