

# Ready or Not, Here I Come

## Topic

Believer's day of reckoning

## Theme

Everyone will face a day of reckoning.

## Desired Learner Response

The learners will prepare for Christ's coming.

## Materials

- Resources 1 and 15
- Index cards and pencils

## Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 12; 13

## Summary

We will learn in this lesson that Paul identified additional characteristics of his apostleship and his work with the Corinthians. He called upon the Corinthians to repent, and he concluded his letter by promising to visit them.

## Outline

- I. Paul's Defense of His Apostleship (2 Cor. 12:1–12)
  - A. Paul's revelations as proof (12:1–4)
  - B. Paul's thorn as proof (12:5–12)
  - C. Paul's position and performance as proof (12:11, 12)
- II. Paul's Dealings with the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:13–18)
- III. Paul's Desires for the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:19–13:10)
  - A. That they repent (12:19–13:4)
  - B. That they practice self-examination (13:5–10)
- IV. Paul's Conclusion to the Letter (2 Cor. 13:11–14)

## Memory Verse

*"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"*  
(2 Corinthians 12:9).

## GETTING STARTED

Use the following activities to introduce your learners to Paul's report of a dramatic revelation and the announcement that he planned to visit Corinth again, whether the Corinthians were ready or not.

### Games Children Play and Games Christians Play

**ASK:** What games did you enjoy playing when you were a child? (Q1)

**ASK:** What games might some Christians be playing when Jesus returns for the church? (Q2)

Paul warned the Corinthians about his soon coming. They had work to do before he arrived. Their reckoning before Paul is a good reminder of our coming reckoning before Christ.

### The Pastor Is Coming! The Pastor Is Coming!

Distribute an index card to each learner. Ask the learners to think about the condition of their homes when they left today to come to this Bible study. Tell the learners that your church's pastor is going to be visiting their home immediately after this lesson. Have the learners list what they would like to do to their homes (e.g., put laundry away, sweep the floors) before the pastor's visit. Allow learners to share some tasks from their lists.

**ASK:** How much time would you like to get your home in order?

**ASK:** Who would like to slip out of the Bible study right now and use the remaining time to clean?

Explain that this lesson focuses on Paul's apostolic authority and his intentions to visit the Corinthians. Paul warned them that he was coming and that they needed to do some spiritual *house-cleaning* before he arrived.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

At the end of chapter 11, we saw that Paul defended his apostolic authority by citing his pedigree and listing his trials. In the first part of chapter 12 he gave still other proofs of his apostleship.

### I. Paul's Defense of His Apostleship (2 Cor. 12:1–12)

#### A. Paul's revelations as proof (12:1–4)

Perhaps the impostors who were opposing Paul claimed to have received special revelations from God. Of course, it has always been easy to claim such revelations because they are hard to discredit. Paul, however, could rightly claim revelations. He announced in 2 Corinthians 12:2, *I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, . . . such an one caught up to the third heaven.*



**ASK:** What does it say about Paul's character that he used the pronoun *one* to refer to his being caught up to the third heaven? (Q3) *He was humble; he wanted to avoid any appearance of boasting.*

Uncertain whether he was caught up to Heaven in body and soul/spirit form or whether only in soul/spirit form (2 Cor. 12:2), Paul simply wrote that he was caught up to *the third heaven*. The first heaven is Earth's atmosphere (Jer. 4:25); the second heaven is space (Gen. 22:17); the third heaven is the abode of God and the good angels (Isa. 6). It was to this highest heaven that Paul was caught up, to the throne of God.

He also called the third heaven *paradise* (2 Cor. 12:4). In Heaven, or paradise, Paul heard things that were too wonderful to repeat.

## B. Paul's thorn as proof (12:5–12)

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 12:5, 6. **ASK:** What internal struggle did Paul relate? (Q4) *Whether or not to glory in his visions.*

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 12:7. **ASK:** Why did God give Paul a *thorn in the flesh*? (Q5) *To keep him from being proud.*

To keep Paul from becoming proud about this revelation, God gave him a “thorn in the flesh” to “buffet” him (12:7). The desire Paul felt to be proud and heady is the same sinful desire that resides in all humans. Left unchecked, Paul's pride would have grown and rendered him useless to the Lord's work.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 12:2. **ASK:** What does Paul's long silence and accompanying humility about such a tremendous experience tell you about how well Paul's thorn in the flesh worked? (Q6) *It must have worked well. Paul certainly had many opportunities in his ministry to mention the visions and revelations.*

As we plainly see in verse 2, Paul was referring to an event that had transpired in his life fourteen years before he wrote 2 Corinthians. This would place the event at the time he was preaching in Tarsus, before Barnabas summoned him to teach in Antioch.

The *thorn in the flesh* has been the subject of much conjecture. Some of the guesses are earache, headaches, false teachers, lustful desires, temptations, an eye disorder, epilepsy, malaria, or sorrow over Israel's unbelief—and the list continues. But the particulars of Paul's thorn in the flesh are irrelevant. He did not disclose them because they did not matter. What mattered was how he responded to the thorn.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 12:7. **ASK:** Paul's thorn in the flesh was *the messenger of Satan*. What did Satan want to accomplish in Paul's life through the thorn? (Q7) *Satan wanted to discourage and distract Paul so he would not be as effective in ministry.*

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 15. **ASK:** What does Satan want to accomplish in a believer's life through *thorns in the flesh*? (Q8) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) *To discourage him or her from following Christ; to distract him or her from the Lord's work.*



**ASK:** What does God want to accomplish in a believer's life through *thorns in the flesh*? (Q9) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) To teach him or her to rely on Him, to keep him or her humble, and to display His power and grace.

Paul prayed three times for God to remove his thorn in the flesh. God's answer each time was no. However, alongside the thorn, God placed His all-sufficient grace (12:9). God's grace supplied the strength Paul needed to deal with the ever-present thorn (12:10). God's grace made all the difference in Paul's life. In fact, Paul even expressed pleasure for the thorn once he understood the power of Christ that rested on him to help him deal with it. Paul's thorn underscored how important it was for him to remain humble and therefore usable to God. Paul's thorn and God's grace helped him remain a viable apostle throughout his life.

**ASK:** How has a *thorn in the flesh* helped you to focus on eternal things and prepare you for the coming day of reckoning before Christ your Judge? (Q10)

**ASK:** How has God's grace been sufficient for you in your everyday life? (Q11)

### **C. Paul's position and performance as proof (12:11, 12)**

Paul continued to defend his apostolic authority by appealing to his position and his performance. In verse 11 he spoke of his position among the other apostles. He did not want to defend himself by talking about himself, but the Corinthians had compelled him to do so by failing to defend him before the impostors. Paul ranked well ahead of the so-called super apostles, who were in reality false apostles.

In verse 12 Paul described his performance as a true apostle. The signs of an apostle were evident in his life and ministry. Just as miraculous works authenticated the credentials of true apostles, such as Peter, James, and John, so miraculous works were evident in Paul's ministry.

## **II. Paul's Dealings with the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:13–18)**

In verses 13–15 Paul described his dealings with the Corinthians. He dealt with them in an attitude of love. Though they did not love Paul, he loved them dearly.

**READ:** Romans 5:8. **ASK:** How does this verse help you to love those who seem unworthy of your love? (Q12) *Christ loved us when we were unlovely and unworthy of His love.*

In verses 16–18 Paul answered the accusation that he took advantage of the Corinthians. This was another false charge his enemies had brought against him. He did not take financial support from the Corinthians, and he would follow that policy because he wanted the Corinthians to understand that he was interested in them, not in their possessions. Those whom Paul sent to minister to the Corinthians followed Paul's example. They, too, were men of integrity. They didn't fleece the Corinthians; they fed them. They didn't bilk them out of their funds; they built them up in the faith.



### III. Paul's Desires for the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:19–13:10)

#### A. That they repent (12:19–13:4)

Verse 19 reveals Paul's motive in writing to the Corinthians. He did not write 2 Corinthians simply to defend himself but to edify the Corinthians—to build them up in the Lord. Yet Paul feared that when he arrived at Corinth, he would find them still living in sin (12:20). This was not how he wanted to find them. In such a case, he would have to be strict with them. That would be extremely unpleasant for him and for the Corinthians too.

While Paul had always been motivated by love for the Corinthians, he promised not to spare the sinful, unrepentant minority (12:21). He stated that this was going to be his third visit to Corinth (13:1). Then he quoted Deuteronomy 19:15, which calls for two or three witnesses in a judgment case. Paul's three visits seemed to serve as three witnesses.

Paul also promised to manifest the power of Christ when he came to Corinth (2 Cor. 13:2–4). His opponents charged that he was weak when he was present at Corinth; Paul answered that charge by promising to deal sternly with the unrepentant minority.

**ASK:** How can a parent's disciplining a child indicate genuine love for the child? (Q13) *Discipline is a small pain that directs the child away from destruction and toward God's blessing; it is a loving action.*

**ASK:** What was Paul communicating to the Corinthians through his warnings of his serious dealing with their sin? (Q14) *That he loved them and that he was graciously willing to give them time to repent. Paul modeled Christ's example of long-suffering, love, and grace.*

#### B. That they practice self-examination (13:5–10)

Paul counseled the Corinthians to examine themselves (13:5). They should have been examining themselves so they could rid their church of sinful practices. Paul would much rather have had the Corinthians resolve the problem of such sinful practices so he would not have to use severity during his visit. He wanted the Corinthians to manifest purity and perfection. He wanted them to do right, not wrong.

If the Corinthians repented and turned from sin, Paul would not have to inflict punishment on them. *When we are weak* (13:9) suggests not being able to display power in punishment. If the Corinthians repented and served the Lord sincerely, they would be strong, and Paul would not have to reprove them (13:9, 10).

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 11:28–31. **ASK:** What purpose does self-examination serve in the life of the believer? (Q15) *It helps avoid being disciplined by the Lord; it causes the believer to stop and take inventory of his or her relationship with God.*

### IV. Paul's Conclusion to the Letter (2 Cor. 13:11–14)

The conclusion to 2 Corinthians consists of a final appeal, a word of greeting, and a benediction. This is typical of the conclusions in Paul's letters.

Paul started by saying, *Finally, brethren*. Despite all their troubles and problems and their attacks on his authority, Paul still called them brothers. The apostle was certainly a great man of God. He continued by giving four exhortations.

**ASK:** What four admonitions did Paul give the Corinthians in 13:11? (Q16)  
(Write the exhortations on the whiteboard as learners mention them.)

(1) *Be perfect*. Paul wasn't advocating sinless perfection. He was encouraging the Corinthians to work toward the goal of spiritual maturity.

(2) *Be of good comfort*. This command seems to challenge the Corinthians to encourage one another.

(3) *Be of one mind*. This exhortation summoned them to patch the tears (see 1 Corinthians 1:10–17) in their fellowship and bind themselves together.

(4) *Live in peace*. This exhortation was a result of living in unity.

The Corinthians' squabbles had, in effect, shut God out of their midst. God is a loving God. If they would live in harmony with one another, they would experience the full assurance of the love and peace of God in their hearts.

**TESTIMONY:** Share one thing you appreciate about the fellowship you enjoy in their church.

After exhorting the Corinthians to experience unity, Paul added, *Greet one another with an holy kiss* (13:12). In our culture it would seem very strange and inappropriate to greet one another this way. In early Christianity it was the customary way Christians greeted one another. However, we should observe the word *holy* in Paul's exhortation. Affectionate greetings among Christians were significant beyond mere custom; they expressed the unity the believers found in faith.

The false teachers in Corinth didn't like Paul, but Macedonian believers surrounded him when he wrote 2 Corinthians. They loved Paul and joined him in sending greetings to the Corinthians (13:13).

Paul concluded 2 Corinthians with the fullest benediction found in any of his epistles. It mentions all three Persons of the Trinity (13:14).

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

Use the following activities to help your learners personalize this lesson's truths.

### **Pride: The Pitfall of Success**

Spiritual victories, success in ministry, and special giftedness all bring the temptation to credit ourselves with our spiritual accomplishments.

**ASK:** How can you guard your life against sinful pride? (Q17)

### **Sufficient Grace**

**ASK:** What situation are you dealing with that requires a generous supply of divine grace? (Q18)

## The Lord Is Coming! The Lord Is Coming!

Have your learners take out their lists of the household chores they would like to accomplish before their pastor visits their homes. Ask them to turn the list over and write a new list. This time tell them that Christ is coming for them soon and they have a limited time to get ready to face Him. Have the learners list the urgent *house-cleaning* needs they have in their personal lives.

Ask the learners to take their lists home and spend time reviewing the applications God laid on their hearts during their study of 2 Corinthians (Q19). Challenge them to follow through on those applications so their *homes* might be *neat and clean* when Christ makes His imminent visit.

## Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: By God's grace I can prepare for Christ's coming.

Encourage your learners to memorize 2 Corinthians 12:9. Give them an opportunity to quote the verses in class next week.

Waves of Grace	
By God's grace I can ...	7.
1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.

