

**PAUL'S
SECOND EPISTLE
TO THE
CORINTHIANS**

.....

**LUTHER E.
SCHWARTZKOPF**

LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY

Living Way Bible Study, Inc. is an auxiliary of the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). All studies are written and/or edited by LCMS pastors. We have been providing studies to churches throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1982.

For a *suggested* donation of \$1-per-lesson within a study (e.g., 23-lesson study of John is \$23) you receive an original of the study, from which you are then free to make copies for your class. Please honor our copyright of these materials.

As a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that relies solely on freewill donations, additional donations are much appreciated and enable us to continue to produce and promote the study of God's Word.

If you have any questions or comments on this study, please contact us. We are always eager to hear from our students and appreciate your comments.

Living Way Bible Study, Inc.

info4LWBS@aol.com

www.livingwaybiblestudy.org

 facebook.com/livingwaybiblestudy

Copyright © 1982, 2015 by Living Way Bible Study, Inc.

This study has been revised and updated in 2015 to include quotations from the English Standard Version, along with the 1984 NIV.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission from Living Way Bible Study, Inc.

WELCOME TO LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY (LWBS)

LWBS is a practical course of study with a special emphasis on the application of God's Word to the life of the individual. While emphasizing practical application, LWBS presents each book of the Bible as the holy, inspired, Word of God, the confessional position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Our purpose is to help equip believers to live joyfully in God's redeeming love and to share with others God's plan of salvation.

It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this study to help you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of our God and His Word. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* 2 Peter 3:18.

STUDY STRUCTURE

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY SUGGESTS THIS FOUR-STEP METHOD

- 1. PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
- 2. SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
- 3. THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
- 4. THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

PAUL'S SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

LUTHER E. SCHWARTZKOPF

13 LESSONS

AUTHOR INFORMATION	I	LESSON 4 : 2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-13	23
		Paul's "Painful Visit" – 2 Corinthians 2:1-2	23
BIBLIOGRAPHY	III	A Glimpse into the Heart of a "Master-Pastor"	
		2 Corinthians 2:3-4	24
LESSON 1 : INTRODUCTION	1	The Good News / Bad News Report from Titus	
Author	2	2 Corinthians 2:5-11	25
Originally Intended Readers	2	Sleepless in Troas – 2 Corinthians 2:12-13	27
Paul's Relationship with the Church in Corinth	3	Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:18	28
Purpose of the Letter	3		
Date and Place of Writing	4	LESSON 5 : 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-3:18	31
Unity of the Letter	4	A Favorable Outcome Is a Sure Thing!	
Value of the Letter	5	2 Corinthians 2:14-17	31
Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 1:1-11	6	Paul Flashes Impressive Credentials	
		2 Corinthians 3:1-6	33
LESSON 2 : 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11	8	Paul Humbly Gives All Credit to God	
A Greeting Loaded with Significance		2 Corinthians 3:4-6a	34
2 Corinthians 1:1-2	8	Important Thought about the New Covenant	
Words of Praise to God the Father		2 Corinthians 3:6b-18	34
and our Lord Jesus Christ – 2 Corinthians 1:3-7	10	The Greater Glory of the New Covenant	
So, Put Your Trust in God – 2 Corinthians 1:8-11	12	2 Corinthians 3:7-18	35
Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 1:12-24	13	Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 4:1-18	37
LESSON 3 : 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-24	16	LESSON 6 : 2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-18	40
Paul Answers the Charges of Untrustworthiness		He Remembers Who Gave Him This "Duty"	
2 Corinthians 1:12-24	16	2 Corinthians 4:1	40
Paul Asks Them to Trust Their Own Experience		This Confidence Shaped His Style	
2 Corinthians 1:12-14	17	2 Corinthians 4:2	41
Now About His Change of Travel Plans		Why Didn't This Power Always Work?	
2 Corinthians 1:15-17	17	2 Corinthians 4:4	42
Paul Shoots Down the Detractors' "False Spin"		Paul's Goal in Ministry – 2 Corinthians 4:5-7	43
2 Corinthians 1:18-20	18	A Study in Contrasts All the Way – 2 Corinthians 4:8-12	43
Four Other Truths We Can Say 'Amen' to		The Basis for Devotion to Ministry	
2 Corinthians 1:21-22	19	2 Corinthians 4:13-18	44
Bottom Line: He Was Concerned About Them!		Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 5:1-6:2	46
2 Corinthians 1:23-24	20		
Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 2:1-13	21	LESSON 7 : 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-6:2	49
		How We Are to Think About Death – 2 Corinthians 5:1-5	49

Paul Brings a New “Worldview” – 2 Corinthians 5:6–8	50
Our Life Here Takes on New Importance	
2 Corinthians 5:9	51
What We Do Counts on Judgment Day	
2 Corinthians 5:10	51
This Explains Paul’s Resolve – 2 Corinthians 5:11–15	52
New Attitudes Toward People – 2 Corinthians 5:16–17	53
God Reaches Out Through Christ – 2 Corinthians 5:18–19	53
Paul’s Urgent Appeal – 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2	53
Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 6:3–7:4	54

LESSON 8 : 2 CORINTHIANS 6:3–7:4 57

Paul’s Faithfulness in Difficult Times – 2 Corinthians 6:3–5	57
Positive Qualities of Paul’s Ministry – 2 Corinthians 6:6–7	58
The Irony of It All – 2 Corinthians 6:8–10	59
Paul’s Emotional Appeal – 2 Corinthians 6:11–13	59
Some Advice about Relationships	
2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1	59
Paul’s Final Plea for Full Acceptance	
2 Corinthians 7:2–4	62
Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 7:5–8:12	63

LESSON 9 : 2 CORINTHIANS 7:5–8:12 66

Paul’s State of Mind in Macedonia – 2 Corinthians 7:5–7	66
Paul’s Evaluation of the Experience	
2 Corinthians 7:8–10	67
Blessed Results Highlighted – 2 Corinthians 7:11–12	67
Their Response Brought Joy to Titus, Too!	
2 Corinthians 7:13–16	68
Emergency Plans to Help the Starving	
2 Corinthians 8:1–5	69
Encouraged to Get Involved – 2 Corinthians 8:6–12	70
Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 8:13–9:15	71

LESSON 10 : 2 CORINTHIANS 8:13–9:15 74

God’s Way of Taking Care of His People	
2 Corinthians 8:13–15	74
Paul Sends a Strong Support Team	
2 Corinthians 8:16–21	75
The Importance of a Good Follow-through	
2 Corinthians 9:1–5	76

A Compelling Reason to Be Generous	
2 Corinthians 9:6–11	77
More Good Reason to Follow Paul’s Advice	
2 Corinthians 9:12–15	78
Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 10:1–11:15	80

LESSON 11 : 2 CORINTHIANS 10:1–11:15 83

About the Charge that He Was “Chicken”	
2 Corinthians 10:1–11	83
Paul’s Critique of the False Teachers	
2 Corinthians 10:12–18	85
Paul’s Deep Concern for His People	
2 Corinthians 11:1–1.5	86
Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 11:16–12:13	88

LESSON 12 : 2 CORINTHIANS 11:16–12:13 91

Another “Surprise Twist” in Paul’s Appeal	
2 Corinthians 11:16–18	91
Paul’s “Fool’s Speech” – 2 Corinthians 11:21b–29	92
Paul’s Special Vision – 2 Corinthians 12:1–6	94
Paul’s “Thorn-in-the-Flesh” – 2 Corinthians 12:7–10	95
The “Fool’s Speech” Concluded – 2 Corinthians 12:11–13	95
Personal Application – 2 Corinthians 12:14–13:14	96

LESSON 13 : 2 CORINTHIANS 12:14–13:14 99

About His Policy to Not Accept Money from Them	
2 Corinthians 12:14–18	99
They Should Know Why He Gave His Defense	
2 Corinthians 12:19–21	100
Paul’s Stern Warnings – 2 Corinthians 13:1–4	102
Apostolic Authority’s Primary Function	
2 Corinthians 13:5–10,	102
A Fond Farewell – 2 Corinthians 13:11–13	103
Paul’s Special Blessing – 2 Corinthians 13:14	103

AUTHOR INFORMATION

LUTHER E. SCHWARTZKOPF

LWBS Courses: *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*

The Letter of Paul to the Colossians

The Epistle of James

The First Epistle of Peter

The Second Epistle of Peter & Jude

Born in China of missionary parents (1922)

Graduated from Concordia College (Milwaukee) in 1940 and Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) in 1945

Received degree in Sociology and graduate studies in Counseling Psychology from California State University (San Bernardino, CA)

Spent entire ministry in the Southern CA District (1945–1988)

Missionary-at-large, E. Sierra area (1945–48)

Immanuel, Oceanside and Fallbrook (1948–50)

Trinity, San Bernardino (1950–72)

First full-time Director of Arrowhead Lutheran Camp (1972–88)

Served on District Bible Institute staff; developed and taught courses: How to Study the Bible and God's Purpose for Lutheran Women

Graduate Bethel Bible Series, Bible Study Institute

Served twenty (20) years on Synodical District Mission Services Department, six years as chairman

Retired from full-time ministry in 1988. With wife (Ruth) moved back to Bishop, CA to be with grandchildren and enjoy the outdoor activities as well as the beauty and majesty of the High Sierras

Called to Glory — May 13, 2006

THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PAUL'S SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

.....

Franzmann, Martin, *The Word of the Lord Grows*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1961

Gaebelein, Frank E., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 12, Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981

Hoerber, Robert G., *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (NIV), Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1984

Kee, H.C., Young, and Froelich, *Understanding the New Testament*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965

Kretzmann, Paul E., *Popular Commentary of the Bible, N.T. Vol. II*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO 1922

Kuschel, Harlyn J., *People's Bible Commentary, Philippians/Colossians/Philemon*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1992

Thayer, John Henry, *Greek-English Lexicon*, American Book Company, New York, NY, 1889

The Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Volume 11, Abingdon Press, New York, NY, 1957

Luther's Works, selected volumes, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO

BIBLES

The Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV) ® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by Biblica, Inc.®

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, (ESV) Copyright © 2001, 2007 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers

THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

AUTHOR	2
ORIGINALLY INTENDED READERS	2
PAUL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH IN CORINTH	3
PURPOSE OF THE LETTER	3
DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING	4
UNITY OF THE LETTER	4
VALUE OF THE LETTER	5
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1–11	6

“Paul’s experience with the people of Corinth vividly demonstrates the power and sufficiency of God’s awesome Grace.”



THE SUFFICIENCY AND POWER OF GOD’S GRACE

Back when George W. Bush was making a run for the presidency of The United States, one of his campaign promises was that he would do something about the increasing threat of terrorism. Little did he know at the time that this would suddenly become his top priority. The horrific events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent intelligence information made it clear that members of Al-Qaeda had already slipped into our country and set up anti-USA terrorist cells in many places. In his televised speech to the nation, our president sent chills up and down the spines of those who were watching, as he declared all-out war on terrorism, echoing the call to action used by Todd Beamer to rally the heroes on Flight #93 over Pennsylvania on the fateful day: “Let’s Roll!”

It was the threat of “spiritual terrorism” which motivated the apostle Paul to write this second letter to the Christian congregation in the Greek city of Corinth. Because of his bond with this congregation, Pastor Paul felt a personal responsibility for the spiritual well-being of this church that he had founded (2 Corinthians 1:14). As we get into our study of this rich letter, we will discover the ways in which the cohorts of Satan himself “hijacked” the leadership of the congregation. They were “hell-bent” (literally) on carrying members to spiritual and eternal doom.

In this emotional letter, the apostle demonstrates his strategy for dealing with the insidious forces of spiritual terrorism, and he clearly

recommends it to his readers in chapter 12:9. Here it is formulated succinctly in the words Jesus spoke to him following his persistent “three-peat” prayer to God to remove his so-called “thorn in the flesh”: “My grace is sufficient for you!”

AUTHOR

Without question, the author of this letter is “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus,” as stated in the very first verse of the letter and mentioned again in Chapter 10:1. Although Paul mentions Timothy, this does not mean that Timothy was co-author. Since the people in Corinth knew Timothy quite well, Paul must have felt that it would be appropriate to include him in the greeting portion of the letter.

The contents of the letter corroborate the authorship of Paul. It is by far the most personal of Paul’s letters. It has all the characteristics of Paul’s literary style and brings us more autobiographical material than any of Paul’s writings.

ORIGINALLY INTENDED READERS

As stated in the salutation, the letter was originally written for the Christians in the city of Corinth, as well as other believers “in Achaia,” a Roman province which took in all of Greece south of Macedonia. Corinth was the capital city of the province.

The strategic physical location of the ancient city of Corinth had a lot to do with the development of its character as one of the most commercial cultural centers in the area. It was located on the isthmus, which at that point was only about ten miles wide. The captains of merchant ships heading both east and west had a choice of routes. They could elect to sail a distance of 200 miles around the southern tip of Peloponnesus, and take on the risk of having

to deal with violent storms and treacherous currents. The other option for ancient sea-captains was to unload their cargo on one side of the isthmus and have it transported overland. If the vessel was not too large, it could be loaded onto a wheeled vehicle and hauled across the narrowest part of the land on a paved road. The captain would then reload his cargo and be on his way.

Taxes from this activity and other commercial ventures, along two prominent trade routes that crossed each other in Corinth had contributed to the wealth of the city. The city was also renowned the world-over as host to the biennial Isthmian Games, which brought many visitors and large sums of money to the city. The Temple of Aphrodite, the Greek “goddess of love and beauty,” stood atop the hill at whose base the original city was built. Fans of the goddess came to Corinth in droves to take part in the sensual rituals associated with the worship of Aphrodite, who was the equivalent of the Roman Venus.

The glamour and glory of ancient Corinth came to a grinding halt in 146 BC, when the Roman armies overran it. The invaders razed the entire city and took most of its treasures back to Rome. The inhabitants were either killed or sold into slavery. The once beautiful city lay in ruins for almost 100 years. In 44 BC, Julius Caesar ordered it rebuilt, and slaves who had gained their freedom were sent to occupy it.

At the time of Paul, Corinth was no longer a Greek city, but a Roman colony quite cosmopolitan in make-up. Its strategic location on two major trade routes enticed businessmen from a variety of nations. It became a center for the worship of many of the Greco-Roman gods and goddesses. Corinth also had attracted many nationalities and a variety of religions.

We know that among these was a settlement of Jews. Later, a discovery of a stone bearing the inscription “Synagogue of Hebrews” confirmed the Jewish settlement. Its shape and size suggests that it may have served as the lintel over the entrance to the Jewish synagogue where, according to Acts 18:4, Paul preached his first sermon after arriving in Corinth. At the time of Paul, the city of Corinth could very well have deserved the label “sin city.” In many ways, the Corinthians lived in a moral and spiritual “smog” strikingly similar to that in which we find ourselves today.

In 1858, the rebuilt city was destroyed by a major earthquake. The original site was abandoned and the modern city of Corinth was built a little over three miles to the northeast.

PAUL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

The relationship of Paul with the congregation of Christians in Corinth is more fully known than are his dealings with any of the other churches that he founded. According to the book of Acts, Paul's first visit to Corinth was made in the last phase of his second missionary journey when he left Athens and went to Corinth. Here he met with a Jewish couple, Priscilla and Aquila, who along with all the Jews in Rome had been ordered to leave the imperial city under an edict of Emperor Claudius in AD 49. Like Paul, they were newcomers to Corinth, and also like Paul, they made their living with the craft of tent-making (or leather-working). He worked with them during the week and on the Sabbath proclaimed the Gospel in the local synagogue (Acts 18:1–4).

After a fairly short period of time, some of the leaders of the synagogue showed resentment against Paul. They made it so uncomfortable for him that he discontinued his visits to the

synagogue and focused his ministry on the Gentiles. His witnessing was blessed. Along with some Jews who had responded favorably to Paul's message, many non-Jews came to faith and became the nucleus of a Christian congregation in Corinth. While the exact length of time is difficult to calculate, his stay in Corinth must have been around two years, making it the longest stay at any church he founded (Acts 18:9–11).

In its formative stage, this congregation in Corinth had the benefit of the ministry of Paul, assisted by Priscilla and Aquila. Acts 18:24ff tells us that this congregation was also blessed with the services of the highly educated, converted Jew from Alexandria named Apollos. According to Acts 18:28, this man spoke with eloquence and fervor, “proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.”

Paul had a high opinion of how this group of Christians had grown in the faith. In his first letter, he referred to them as having been “enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge...you do not lack any spiritual gift” (1 Cor. 1:5–7). Quite a “positive stroke” for these Christians, especially since it came from their highly respected pastor!

PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

Paul had gotten word from Titus about a troubling situation that was brewing in the congregation at Corinth. It was probably inevitable, with all of the various “isms” being promoted in their community, that some of the weaker members would be misled into one form or another of paganism. But more insidious, was the internal problem of influential false teachers who had wormed their way into positions of leadership and credibility in the congregation. At first some members were “hoodwinked” by these “schmoozers.” The

members, who had come under their influence, inevitably came to realize that a lot of their ideas did not “square” with what Paul had taught them. When they brought this up in their discussions, the false teachers’ response was to disparage the credentials and credibility of Paul. They began a vicious “smear” campaign against him, pulling no punches!

Paul’s primary purpose was to do what he could to undo the damage done to his reputation and somehow bring about a restored relationship with these people who were so dear to him. Second Corinthians offers a marvelous illustration of how the apostle Paul went about his effort to solve this serious problem. For one thing, Paul refrained from scolding the people for being so gullible, or for being disloyal to him. He simply used the Gospel and had faith that this alone could bring about the right outcome. This was a good move on his part. With the blessing of God upon his efforts, his relationship with the people at Corinth was restored and the people so dear to him were brought back to the only living way to God and eternal salvation. Paul’s experience with the people of Corinth vividly demonstrates the power and sufficiency of God’s awesome Grace.

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

Putting together a precise and accurate timetable of Paul’s activities presents quite a challenge. However, most Bible scholars agree that 2 Corinthians was written around AD 55 while Paul was in Macedonia. He had arrived in Corinth for his first visit early in AD 50. When he left Corinth after his extended ministry there, he first went to Antioch. After spending “some time” there, he made his way through Galatia and then on to Ephesus, which became his base of operations for his ministry in Asia Minor. It was in the Spring of AD 55, around the Feast of Pentecost, that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Shortly after, Paul left Ephesus heading for Macedonia, where he met up with Titus and was told about the problems that had flared up in the church at Corinth. It was from Macedonia, shortly before winter, that he wrote what we refer to as 2 Corinthians.

UNITY OF THE LETTER

Many scholars today take the view that one or more sections of 2 Corinthians, as we now have it in our Bibles, simply cannot have belonged to the original document. The footnote in the Concordia Self-Study Bible (NIV) gives a concise summary of some of their reasons for taking this view. Conservative scholars view these theories to be without the support of a single shred of external evidence. Not a single writer from the early years of the Christian Church, not a single original manuscript, and absolutely no thread of tradition have expressed so much as a hint that 2 Corinthians ever existed in any form other than in which we now have it. This is the perspective from which this Bible Study was developed.

.....

This letter's pervading theme of the complete sufficiency and power of God's grace in the face of trials and afflictions of every kind is one that seems in a unique way quite appropriate for the Christian church in the 21st century.

.....

VALUE OF THE LETTER

One commentary begins with the sweeping statement: "Saint Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians may without exaggeration be described as one of the richest of all the writings of the New Testament...its rediscovery today could hardly fail to be an ennobling and fortifying experience for the Church of Christ." This letter's pervading theme of the complete sufficiency and power of God's grace in the face of trials and afflictions of every kind is one that seems in a unique way quite appropriate for the Christian church in the 21st century.

In his book, *The Word of the Lord Grows*, Dr. Franzmann writes:

"The second letter to the Corinthians is certainly one of the most difficult of Paul's letters, which is not to say that it was difficult or obscure for its first readers. They lived in the situation which we must laboriously reconstruct...it is an angel to be

wrestled with, if we would receive a blessing. But the blessing is a rich one and worth the wrestling."

In this letter, Dr. Franzmann also points out that we see Paul the "man" and Paul the "apostle." We see him in battle for his very existence as an apostle. We learn that the battle must be and why it must be. We learn that battle is necessary in the life of the Church and that it can even be beneficial for it. And above all, we learn that the battling in the church doesn't have to forsake the principle of love. Great insights to explore in depth!

God bless our study of 2 Corinthians so that we, who are also being bombarded with false religious ideas and pagan philosophies of life, will be faithful to God's Word and put the power of God's Grace in Christ to work in all we think and do and say. Are you ready? "Let's Roll!"

PERSONAL APPLICATION*2 CORINTHIANS 1:1–11*

God of all Grace, I thank You from the bottom of my heart that, through Your Holy Word and the working of the Spirit, You have opened Your heart to me and showed me all that You have done for me through Your Son Jesus. Help me to grow in my appreciation of the on-going power of Your Grace, as I work through this Bible Study today. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Review

1. What was Paul's primary purpose in writing this letter to the members of the congregation in Corinth, which he had formerly served as pastor?

On which of Paul's three missionary journeys did he first visit the city of Corinth (Acts 15:36–41, 18:1)?

What experience led Paul to travel to mainland Europe in the first place (Acts 16:9–11)?

2 Corinthians 1:1–2

2. Paul identifies himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (v. 1). How does Luke's account of Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road support this statement (Acts 9:1–5)?

Paul elaborates on this in Galatians 1:15. According to Paul, who took the initiative in his miraculous conversion and subsequent call to apostleship?

To what quality of God does Paul here, and in I Corinthians 15:9–10, attribute all of this?

3. Where did Paul and Timothy first meet (Acts 16:1–3)?

How had Timothy been brought to the Christian faith (2 Timothy 1:5)?

As you think about your religious experience, do you see any similarities to that of Paul or Timothy's? Explain.

4. Tell what you have learned about what was going on in the church at Corinth. Do you think Paul had something special in mind when he described the Church as “belonging to God”?

5. Give the name Paul calls the believers in Corinth and in the province of Achaia?

Did this term originate with Paul? (Psalms 30:4, 31:23, 34:9, 116:15) Explain.

What is the theological basis that allows such a title to be given to imperfect people? (Romans 3:23–24).

6. What do you think Paul was wishing for the recipients of this letter with the words “grace” and “peace”?

Write the Hebrew word for “peace.”

2 Corinthians 1:3–7

7. What two qualities of God does Paul highlight as especially worthy of high praise, as he moves into the body of the letter?

With all of the great qualities of God, what do you suppose moved Paul to feature these two in this letter (vv. 4–7 give some hints)?

Paul doesn’t mention specific troubles for which they would need special compassion and comfort. Can you think of some problems that might come their way as they tried to live their faith in a pagan community?

We know that Christians who live in countries which are governed by Muslims (e.g., Sudan, Malaysia, Pakistan) experience all kinds of hardships. Do you sense any problems that come your way because you are a believer?

2 Corinthians 1:8–11

8. What were some afflictions Paul experienced in his quest to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles? (See also 2 Cor. 4:7–12, 11:23–29)

How bad were they? (vv. 8–10)

9. What does Paul request of these Christians (v. 11)? State the two ways good will come as a result.



2 CORINTHIANS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11

WORDS OF PRAISE TO GOD THE FATHER	
AND OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST – 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7	10
SO, PUT YOUR TRUST IN GOD – 2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-11	12
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-24	13

“God reaches out to sinful human beings bestowing upon them his undeserved favor, offering them forgiveness and the invitation to be in a saving relationship with Him. When they accept His invitation, they are clothed in the garment of Christ’s righteousness.”



*WE LEARNED TO COUNT ON GOD: YOU
CAN COUNT ON HIM AND ON US!*

A GREETING LOADED WITH SIGNIFICANCE

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2

The apostle’s goal for this correspondence addressed to the members of the young Christian congregation in Corinth was to repair the serious break in their relationship. Paul understood that this would happen only as a result of the powerful working of God’s grace. This is evident right from the beginning of the letter in the formal greeting.

In the Greek culture of that day, the accepted format was first to mention the name of the sender, followed by the name of the person the letter is addressing. Paul put his name down as the sender. He expanded on it to remind them of a truth about himself, which he felt was extremely important for them to keep in mind as they listened to the letter being read. He calls himself “an apostle of Christ Jesus.” While this does identify him as one who had been commissioned to represent Jesus Christ, his main reason for mentioning it was something other than to stress his authority.

For this occasion and for the goal of this letter, he wanted them to keep something else in mind. So he adds the phrase that hopefully would remind them that it was solely by the power of God’s grace that he held that position. He was “an apostle by the will of God.” To become an

apostle of Jesus was not his idea at all. It was entirely, from beginning to end, God's doing. All they had to do was call to mind his dramatic conversion on the Damascus Road. Jesus Himself initiated the action that would change the heart of this zealous murderer of Christians and transform him into a believer. By itself, the remarkable transformation dramatically demonstrated the power of God's grace. Even more astounding was the fact that the God of Grace chose to make Paul an apostle. Paul holds himself up as a living and breathing example of the dynamic power of God's grace.

Timothy happened to be with Paul in Macedonia when he wrote this letter, so Paul includes him in the greeting, referring to him as "our brother." The term "brother" indicates that a close bond existed between Timothy and Paul. The possessive "our" seems to suggest that a similar bond existed between Timothy and the first recipients of the letter, among whom Timothy had ministered for a time.

The apostle Paul identifies his intended recipients of this letter with one of his favorite titles: "To the church of God in Corinth." Without making a big deal about it, Paul points to a reality that they (and we) should not forget. Although human beings are instrumental in establishing a local congregation and assuming responsibility for financial support, it is important for us to remember at all times that the church belongs to God. In making this point, Paul also may have wanted to establish, in a gentle way, that as an apostle, he has a right to get involved in the congregation's concerns. And, a solemn responsibility to do whatever he can to help this group of God's people remain faithful in its discipleship. So, they should listen to him!

Apparently, Paul had reason to believe that the concerns he had were not limited to the church in Corinth. Therefore, in his greeting he includes church members "who are in the whole of Achaia," the province which covered the southern part of Greece. Note that he calls them "saints," including those in Corinth. This wasn't a new concept. As far back as Samuel, for example, Old Testament believers were often referred to as saints or "holy ones" (Greek: "hagioi"). Note that even though the Christians of Corinth and surrounding areas were "messing up," Paul still gives them the title of "saints."

Paul wasn't "stretching the truth" when he used such a complimentary title for these people. It was based upon good theology. It reflects the basic function of God's all-sufficient grace. God reaches out to sinful human beings bestowing upon them his undeserved favor, offering them forgiveness and the invitation to be in a saving relationship with Him. When they accept His invitation, they are clothed in the garment of Christ's righteousness. God no longer sees them as sinners but as whole people — His holy people. The early Church must have responded to the biblical teaching, cherishing this term. When we join in the Apostles' Creed, we declare that we believe in "the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints." This is an occasion for us to celebrate the exciting reality of how our gracious God regards us.

After the letter-writer identified himself and the intended recipients, it was proper protocol to express a "blessing" or to wish them well with the word "Clairein" (Kyrine). In just about all of their letters, both Paul and Peter took the liberty of using a "play on words." Instead of the customary and similar sounding greeting, they wrote, "Charis," which means "grace." It was

Paul's wish, first of all, that these people receive in full measure God's gift of "Charis" — the undeserved goodness and mercy of God which has the power to bring them into a saving relationship with their Maker. Paul knew that when they would "internalize" this grace, they would experience the power of God's love which prompts it. Then, there would inevitably develop within them a deep love for God. This love will empower them to live a life that pleases Him. God's grace is not just a ticket to heaven; it bestows on those who receive it a powerful and transforming spiritual dynamic in their lives. No wonder Paul gives grace a top priority in his personal wish for his readers of that time and today, as well!

But that wasn't all Paul embodied in his wish for them. His wish for them was "Grace and peace!" With this, Paul highlighted the blessings which would be theirs once they allowed God's free gift of grace to go to work in their lives. The Greek word for "peace" is "eirene" (eye-reh-nay). In this case, the Greeks simply "didn't have a word" to convey the rich meaning of the Hebrew "Shalom." Eirene was the best they could come up with. "Shalom" meant more than just the absence of conflict, strife, or confusion; it had a powerful positive connotation. It described a state of mind and heart which was finely tuned, and integrated with, the higher purposes of the Lord of heaven and earth.

When you take a long look at Paul's short greeting, you can see that it "speaks volumes." It goes way beyond simply wishing people a prosperous, healthy, and happy life. It covers the full scope of life on this earth and the dimension of eternity itself. This was Paul's majestic and meaningful wish for the Corinthians. It was especially fitting for the Christians in Corinth. If they were to have inner-peace, as well as peace in their fellowship, all of them would need to draw upon the all-sufficient power of God's grace. The same goes for us, too!

WORDS OF PRAISE TO GOD THE FATHER AND OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–7

In just about every one of his letters, after the introductory greeting, Paul writes a brief passage of thanksgiving or concern for something special in the lives of his intended readers. (See 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Philippians 1:3–8; Colossians 1:3–8). Here, Paul first focuses on the comfort that he and his fellow workers had recently experienced. Then he explains that all of this had taken place so that he would be in a position to be a strengthening force in their lives as they struggled in their faith. In doing this, Paul was establishing the theme around which the rest of the letter would revolve.

When Paul proclaims “Praise be to God,” he was borrowing from 1st-century Jewish liturgies that are still in use among Jewish people today. But he quickly “Christianizes” it with the phrase, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” attesting to the belief that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the very Son of the Father. He expands on this by calling Jesus “our Lord,” giving Him the very name by which people of the Old Testament referred to the Almighty God. This was something that probably didn’t go unnoticed by his first readers.

The first special quality of God to which Paul’s doxology is directed is that He is “the Father of compassion” (most versions have the word “mercy”). Again, when Paul used this term, it sounded quite similar to prayers from the Old Testament. However, for Paul it was extolling God the Father, whose greatest act of mercy and compassion for human beings was when he “gave His only-begotten Son” to be the Savior of the world. Jesus was compassion personified.

For those Corinthian Christians who accepted God’s compassion, and had been brought into a saving relationship with their Creator, it was also true that their heavenly Father was “The God of all comfort.” The Greek word for “comfort” is *paraklesis*, from which we get one of our names for the Holy Spirit: “Paraclete.” This literally means “one called to your side” — primarily to “be there for you” and to give you the assistance you might need. This suggests a special nuance of meaning for the word “comfort.” Instead of thinking of comfort as simply an expression of sympathy, it has the connotation of “strengthening.” The word “comfort” has the same root as the word “fortify.” We can be quite certain in the light of the theme of this letter that this is what Paul wanted to stress. He wanted his people to count on God to “fortify” them, so that they would be more than equal to the challenges they would meet.

After his proclamation of praise for a God such as this, Paul proceeds to give his personal testimony about his own experience which solidified his conviction about it. He knew from firsthand experience that God could always be counted on to fortify those who trusted in Him. When he makes the “blanket statement” (v. 4) that “God comforts us in all our troubles,” Paul uses the present tense to convey the idea that this comforting is on-going. It is perpetual.

In giving his testimony about the reliability of God in seeing them through “all their troubles,” Paul wants them to see all this from another angle. He wants them to understand that all of this was going to prove to be beneficial for them: “So that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” Because of his experiences, Paul could more easily identify with them in their struggles, and thus be more effective in his ministry to them. More important, he could pass on to them the secret of his survival — confidently entrusting himself and his well-being to the “God of all compassion and comfort.” Talk about personal security! It doesn’t get any better than this.

Naturally, Paul must have given a lot of thought to the whole idea of “Why” he was experiencing so much hardship as he tried to carry out his responsibility as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Obviously, the Holy Spirit gave him some insight. He came up with a clear picture of how it had been with Jesus. Think of how Jesus suffered at the hands of wicked people and the forces of evil. Consider the greater good that came to the world through the redeeming work of Jesus. The same forces of evil were still on hand, doing their utmost to sabotage the work of the apostles. This is what he must have meant when he said that the sufferings of Christ “flow over into our lives.” In a way, such sufferings brought to Paul the blessing

of “sharing” at least a little bit of what Christ experienced. It made him feel closer to His Lord. As a result of this personal suffering, Paul would also be better able to identify with others who were struggling with their faith, and thus be better qualified to help them.

This thought is repeated and spelled out clearly in verses 6 and 7. Paul confidently expresses his personal conviction that they will have a better way of dealing with the adversities that will come their way. We have to admit that we can only guess the nature of these adversities. Very likely, it wasn't going to be like some of the things Paul had experienced. From the outside, there may have been such things as hostility, denunciation, discrimination, which came their way from people in their pagan community. Or it may have come from conflicts within families or relations. We know that the persecution of Christians seemed to be inevitable in the Early Church, as it had been predicted by Jesus Himself (John 15:20).

In verse 7, Paul expresses his confidence in the Corinthian Christians. He tells them: “Our hope for you is firm.” These words certainly give a strong hint that whatever had caused the rift between them and the apostle had been cleared up. The basis for his unshaken hope is that as they are sharing in sufferings, they also are sharing in the comfort that God provides. Whatever spiritual terrorists may come up with, the Corinthians are “fortified.” They have a well-founded security against spiritual terrorism.

SO, PUT YOUR TRUST IN GOD

2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-11

So that the people in Corinth would get an idea of the complete reliability of God, Paul gives a specific example from a recent personal experience, which we assume they hadn't

known. He refers to the “hardships we suffered in Asia” (vv. 8–9). While we really can't say precisely what had taken place, we certainly get the impression that things got pretty ugly. He says, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure so that we despaired even of life.” In fact, Paul recollects, “in our hearts we felt the sentence of death” (v. 9). Paul said that the situation in which he found himself was absolutely hopeless and, that humanly speaking, there wasn't a ray of hope left in him. As far as Paul was concerned, he was “as good as dead.”

But even this situation wasn't a problem for God. God came through and delivered him. “He delivered us from such a deadly peril” (v. 10). Paul shared what he gained from this experience. He learned the lesson that we should not depend upon ourselves. But even more importantly, he learned that you can trust in God, no matter how desperate the situation might be: “On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us” (v. 10).

In verse 11, Paul tacks on a short statement about the importance of intercessory prayer. He attributes his deliverance from the jaws of death solely to divine intervention. Then he involves his friends in Corinth concerning his safety in future “close calls.” Even though God does it all by Himself, He welcomes the appeals of His people by way of intercessions. When God's people become involved in prayer, on behalf of someone like the apostle Paul, they praise God by declaring that they are looking to Him for divine help. When help arrives, they are set to thank Him for His “gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many” (v. 11). God is honored, and the people expressing their faith are enriched by this interchange with God.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12–24

Gracious Father in Heaven, as I open my Bible to Paul's second letter to the Church in Corinth, I open my heart to the Holy Spirit. Please help me to understand and take to heart what You want to teach me so that my faith may grow, and so that I may sense the Spirit's presence in my life, through Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Amen.

Review

1. This section of 2 Corinthians deals with Paul's defense of his personal integrity. Please consult Lesson 1 to provide the following details.

Who was responsible for influencing the Corinthians to question the integrity of the Apostle Paul?

What was the motive for doing this?

On what action of Paul did they base their contention that he was not trustworthy?

Why do you think Paul was so concerned about vindicating himself in the eyes of the church at Corinth?

2 Corinthians 1:12–24

2. As Paul recalls the years he spent as pastor to the Corinthians, what is his assessment of his performance in their midst?

What "approach" does he say he disavowed in all of his dealings with them?

What do you think Paul meant by his statement here concerning "sincerity and holiness," that his record was impeccable, "especially in our relations with you"? (Acts 18:11)

3. In appealing to his readers to trust him, to which future event does he turn their attention?

How do you see a lesson in this for your faith?

2 Corinthians 1:15–17

4. When Paul writes in verse 15 that he was "confident of this," on the part of the people of Corinth, what is he referring to (see preceding verses)?
-

Paul acknowledges that he hadn't kept the promise he made about a proposed visit. What was he counting on, on the part of the Corinthians?

Put yourself into the picture. You are a member of the congregation at Corinth. Would it be your first impulse to accuse Paul of lacking integrity because he made a switch in his travel plans?

Whom did the Corinthians allow to influence their thinking in such a negative way? (Acts 18:12)

What should the people have done? (If you have a copy of the Small Catechism, check out Luther's explanation of the positive side of the Eighth Commandment)

2 Corinthians 1:18–22

5. What does Paul do at the beginning of verse 18 to show that he considers these attacks against his integrity as very serious?

If the people of Corinth went along with the charges against Paul, how might this affect their attitude toward his message?

What was "at stake" for the people?

What assurance does Paul give his readers about the message he had proclaimed to them while he was with them?

In whom has God said "YES" to every prophecy of the Old Testament, according to Paul?

6. In verse 18, what does Paul do again as he strives to show that they should not question the authenticity of anything he had taught them?

What did Jesus teach about the use of oaths? (See Matthew 5:33–37).

How might you reconcile Paul's frequent use of oaths with the words of Jesus?

How does the word “Amen” indicate that the Corinthians should never have any doubt about the Gospel of God?

2 Corinthians 1:23–24

7. Which words in verse 23 show that Paul had his readers in mind when he changed his plans?

Which two phrases in verse 24 help us to understand how Paul wanted them to regard his style of ministry?

What it wasn't

What it was



2 CORINTHIANS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-24

PAUL ASKS THEM TO TRUST THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE	
2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-14	17
NOW ABOUT HIS CHANGE OF TRAVEL PLANS	
2 CORINTHIANS 1:15-17	17
PAUL SHOOTS DOWN THE DETRACTORS' "FALSE SPIN"	
2 CORINTHIANS 1:18-20	18
FOUR OTHER TRUTHS WE CAN SAY 'AMEN' TO	
2 CORINTHIANS 1:21-22	19
BOTTOM LINE: HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THEM!	
2 CORINTHIANS 1:23-24	20
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-13	21

“Enter into the joy of the Lord.”

.....

PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS PERSONAL INTEGRITY

The days preceding the most recent Election Day proved to be quite typical of most previous elections. Many candidates tried desperately to come up with something that they could use to discredit their opponents. Some observers called it “negative campaigning.” People on the street use a more colorful term and call it plain old “mud-slinging.”

PAUL ANSWERS THE CHARGES OF UNTRUSTWORTHINESS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12 – 24

The false teachers in Corinth engaged in vicious “mud-slinging” hoping to discredit Paul and win the support of the members of the congregation. As one writer put it, “they went right to the jugular vein of character.” They questioned Paul’s integrity. They reminded the people of an incident with which all of them were familiar. In his first letter to them, he had indeed promised to visit them right after he had traveled through Macedonia. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 16 that he was looking forward to the visit and hoped that he would be able to stay awhile. He mentioned that he even hoped to spend the entire winter with them. It was a matter of record that this didn’t happen. He had not kept that promise. The “spin” which his detractors put on Paul’s failure to keep his promise was: “See! How can you possibly trust a man who says one thing and does something else?”

PAUL ASKS THEM TO TRUST THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12–14

Before Paul takes on the matter of his change of travel plans, he asks his former parishioners to just stop and think about their personal experience with him while he was their pastor. Close to two years would have given them ample time to judge his character. Had he ever done anything that would give them just cause to question his integrity? This is a rhetorical question for which Paul takes the liberty to give the answer. He tells them that this is the one thing of which he was especially proud. His record with them was impeccable. “Our conscience testifies we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God” (v. 12).

Please note that when Paul writes, “especially with you,” he doesn’t mean to imply that he was less than that with others. He is simply suggesting that because he was with them for such an extended ministry they may have had more opportunities to be impressed with his sincerity and trustworthiness. Perhaps, to keep his detractors from using such a boast against him, he makes it clear that he was able to conduct himself with integrity because God had so empowered him.

In the last statement of verse 12 about “worldly wisdom,” Paul seems to be alluding to the underhanded tactics of the false teachers in their attack on Paul’s reputation, as well as their methods of propagating their false ideas. Paul takes the opportunity to emphasize again that both his conduct and his message of salvation and hope were gifts of “God’s grace.”

In verse 13, Paul elaborates on what this means to them. The message he had brought

them was never fuzzy or ambiguous. They could trust the integrity of it. They didn’t have to “read between the lines,” or look for double meanings. In verse 14, Paul expresses his hope that as they remember his performance while he was with them, and as they read his correspondence, they will agree with Paul about his evaluation of his ministry among them. “As you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us.” He deserved their commendations.

The apostle Paul just can’t pass up an opportunity to bring up the “end times.” He does so not to strike fear and terror into their hearts, but only to emphasize how important it was for them to live out their lives with the dimensions of eternity in the picture at all times. On the Great Day of the Lord’s Second Coming, they will experience a gratifying vindication for their “boasting” of Paul and his Gospel message. On that day they will hear God’s commendation for Paul: “Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of the Lord” (Matthew 25:21). Their pride in Paul will be accompanied by personal gratitude that they had remained loyal to Paul. For they, too, will hear God welcome them into Paradise. As you and I remain faithful to the Gospel of God, we also can look forward to hearing that same gracious invitation to “enter into the joy of the Lord.” We, too, will be filled with a new sense of appreciation for those who faithfully brought the Gospel to us — our parents, pastors, Sunday School Teachers, Bible Study Teachers, relatives and friends.

NOW ABOUT HIS CHANGE OF TRAVEL PLANS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:15–17

Before Paul launches into his explanation of how his change of plans developed, he gently chides them for allowing these itinerant theologians to spoil what he regarded as a relationship of

mutual trust. He writes: “Because I was confident of this...” (v. 15). The thought had never entered his mind that they would be anything but loyal to him. It must have been like that for God when he was “let down” by our first parents in the Garden of Eden. The Lord had a wonderful relationship with Adam and Eve. He had never disappointed them. He met all their needs and gave them a completely happy existence. God had every reason to believe that they would be loyal to Him. Along came God’s detractor, a complete stranger to them. Like a smooth-talking traveling salesman, he began to sell them “a bill of goods” that God was “holding back” something from them. Satan injected into their minds the seed of doubt. In just a matter of minutes, Adam and Eve moved from trusting God to gobbling up the “sales pitch” of God’s great enemy. Unbelievable!

Paul goes on to explain that when he decided to change plans he was thinking of what might be best for them, “so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia.” This way, instead of one visit from the apostle, they would have two! Obviously, this was Paul’s answer to the charge that he was undependable, and maybe even a bit “wishy-washy.” He implied that he had given a lot of thought to his decision to alter his itinerary. He didn’t do it “lightly.” Furthermore, whenever he makes plans, as in his original plan to visit them, he sincerely intended to follow through. He didn’t “make...plans in a worldly manner,” saying “Yes, yes” and “No, no” in the same breath! Circumstances had changed. What would be best for them was always the overriding factor. If they had not allowed their minds to be contaminated by opinions of people who didn’t even know Paul personally, they probably would have given Paul the benefit of any doubt about his change of plans. Doesn’t this send a warning to us about our willingness to give credence to negative rumors (especially “juicy gossip”) about church leaders and others?

PAUL SHOOTS DOWN THE DETRACTORS’ “FALSE SPIN”

2 CORINTHIANS 1:18-20

When he wrote “But as surely as God is faithful,” Paul put himself under an oath. The “hidden agenda” of his detractors was quite obvious to him. They wanted to destroy his credibility so the people in Corinth would be more open to accepting the “new teachings” which they wanted to promote among them. Unlike other biblical authors, it was fairly common for Paul to use oaths when he wanted to defend or emphasize a crucial truth. This fits in quite well with what we know about his passion for the Gospel and the intensity of his personality.

It was especially appropriate in these circumstances. For Paul, it was a real crisis. They needed to know that there was absolutely nothing shaky or questionable about the saving truths which he and his associates, Silas and Timothy, had taught them. It was never a Yes or No, but always and only “Yes.” Paul goes beyond concern for his standing with them. He inserts a “plug” for the Old Testament Scripture as well. All of the Messianic Prophecies, God had miraculously fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus, all of them were a resounding “YES!” What Paul taught them could be validated by checking it against what the Scriptures of the Old Testament clearly taught. Since this was something they could count on, Paul writes: “And so through him [Jesus] the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

Paul may be alluding here to a practice in Jewish synagogues of that day. When the worship leader spoke a word of praise to God, members of the congregation would personally validate what the leader had said by declaring “Amen!” The word was carried over to the New Testament worship. In some churches today, “Amen” has become a formalized response to prayers and benedictions, which are spoken by the worship leader.

Sometimes it is sung and at other times is simply spoken. In churches with less-structured worship, congregation members are encouraged to shout “Amen” whenever they are moved “by the Spirit” to express their endorsement of what a preacher has said. The “Amen” fervently proclaims in the vernacular: “Right on!” All of this can serve to remind us that no matter how wonderful and glorious the truths about God may be, it really doesn’t have much value for us until we personally endorse them. Whether aloud, or silently in our heart, we need to affirm with a solid Amen, through which we say: “That’s for sure!”

FOUR OTHER TRUTHS WE CAN SAY ‘AMEN’ TO

2 CORINTHIANS 1:21–22

Having established the dependability of God Himself, Paul builds on this truth as he proceeds to make his case before the people of Corinth. He reminds them that God Himself has been involved in all this, every step of the way. To help them get a clear understanding of what this means, Paul uses four illustrations or analogies, drawn from everyday life.

First, he wanted them to bring into sharp focus this basic truth: “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ” (v. 21). The Greek word for “stand firm” was a legal term that indicated certain things will be carried out, as in a contract. In this case, Paul was focusing on his personal trustworthiness, as well as the Corinthians themselves. In effect, this is what Paul is saying here: “God will follow through on what He has begun.” It’s in the contract! God will not let you down (2 Timothy 1:12).

Second, Paul says it was God who had called him to be a special messenger who would speak for God. He says he had been “anointed” by God to take on this awesome responsibility. He used the same word (*chríoo*) that the Septuagint (Greek Translation of the Old Testament) used in Exodus 28:41 where Moses was told to anoint his brother Aaron and his sons to be priests of God. Saul was similarly “anointed” to be the first King of Israel (1 Samuel 9:16). In the Old Testament, anointing involved a ceremony in which oil was poured on the head of a person designated by God for a certain task. The English translation of the title “Messiah” is simply “The Anointed One.” The Greek word for “Messiah” is “Christos.” The root in the verb “*chríoo*” means “to anoint.” It is quite obvious that Paul was not speaking of a literal anointing with oil. He had in mind an anointing by the Holy Spirit. Paul wanted to leave this thought with them: He did what he did because God had commissioned him. Thus, his message had the authority and efficacy of God behind it.

The third “picture” word which Paul reminds them to keep in mind is that God had “set his seal of ownership on us.” Again, this is a term from the world of commerce. It referred to the practice of attaching a wax seal to the opening of a sack or an

envelope, to indicate ownership and to be a warning not to mess with its contents. Some students of the Bible take this as a reference to Holy Baptism, through which God claims us as His very own. We receive the sign of the Cross on our forehead and over our heart, to signify that through Christ, our crucified Savior, we belong to God with all of our being. Others see it as a reference to the evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit which effectively identifies us as belonging to God!

The fourth analogy which Paul uses is from the world of commerce. Paul says that God had “put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” A deposit is made by a buyer to a seller as a guarantee that the balance of the purchase price will soon be paid. When believers experience a measure of the Holy Spirit in their lives, it points to the future when believers will experience to the full what it means to be in a saving relationship with God. Paul wants them to know that he and his colleagues have the Spirit of God in their lives now, and they take this as a strong guarantee that they will experience the fullness of it someday. God will keep His Word! When you and I express our faith in the Gospel and in God’s promises for life and eternity, we can be sure that the Spirit of God is within us (See: 1 Corinthians 2:10–16).

Why did Paul go to such great lengths to make these four concepts illustrate the complete dependability of God? A very plausible explanation is that he wants them to understand that God has been involved every step of the way in all of Paul’s planning and doing. Thus the charge that he has been fickle and frivolous in his dealings with the Corinthians simply doesn’t “hold water.” The charge brought against Paul by his detractors simply doesn’t have any basis in reality, whatsoever.

BOTTOM LINE:

HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THEM!

2 CORINTHIANS 1:23–24

Once again, Paul uses an oath, calling God as his “witness” to corroborate what Paul gave as his reason for his change of plans. It was for their benefit: “In order to spare you” (v. 23).

Verse 24 is almost like a parenthetical statement that Paul slipped into this discussion about his intense concern for them. He may have sensed that a possible response to this could have been that Paul was “stepping over the line” a bit. “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.” It’s like he’s taking a step back to make clear that he recognized that ultimately they have personal responsibility in the matter of faith. However, because of his love for them, he wants to work with them to get them back on solid ground. His motive for his passionate concern is that they might experience the joy that comes from being faithful to God. Paul gives us a neat model of ministry. It emphasizes genuine pastoral concern that shows itself in a cooperative “working together,” rather than in a domineering, “knuckle under,” authoritarian pastoral style.

Paul isn’t quite finished with his impressive vindication of his ministry and his personal integrity. He told the members of the church at Corinth not to listen to the renegade false teachers. He assured them that he loved them and wanted only the best for them — always!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 2:1–13

Lord Jesus Christ, what a remarkable man Your apostle Paul was! The more that I learn about his faith and love, the more I appreciate him as an example and mentor for the kind of person I know You want me to be. Please help me to put into practice what I learn from him. Thank you Lord Jesus! Amen.

Review

- Why was the Apostle Paul so concerned about how the members of the church in Corinth felt about his personal integrity?
 - ☐ His pride had been deeply wounded by the unfair charges of his detractors.
 - ☐ He felt rejected by the people of Corinth who were very important to him.
 - ☐ He did not want them to have any doubt about the message he proclaimed to them.
- What does he do twice in chapter 1:18–23 to show how deeply concerned he was about making sure they would believe him, rather than his detractors?

2 Corinthians 2:1–4

- In 2 Corinthians 1:23, Paul explained that he had postponed his planned visit because he wanted to “spare” them. From what did he want to spare them (2:1)?

Do you think Paul is referring to his first visit of about 2 years (2:4–7)? Why or why not?

In 12:14 and 13:1, what number does Paul give his next planned visit? _____

In 2:3, Paul wants to spare not only them by delaying his visit, but who else?

- Paul refers to this intermediate visit and the written communication which followed as “painful” and “severe.” What inferences can you draw from verses 5–7 as to what would make it so “painful” for everyone involved?

What does Paul say in verses 2–4 that required him to write this “severe” letter?

- This letter was not included in the New Testament. What possibilities could account for its absence from the canon of Scripture? (See John 20:30 & 21:25)
-

2 Corinthians 2:5–11

6. This portion of chapter 2 deals with the treatment which should be accorded to a man who had committed an offense, that Paul says had severely “grieved” both him and the people to whom he is writing. What do you think the offense might be?

7. On what directive of Paul had the congregation at Corinth evidently followed through, according to verse 6?

8. What kind of punishment do you think they might have given him?

9. What did a minority feel about the extent of the punishment that had been meted out to the offender?

10. Why was Paul concerned about “excessive” punishment for the man who had asked for forgiveness (v.7)?

11. Who might claim the victory if this happened (v. 11)?

12. What positive things does Paul say (v. 7) they were to “put into the mix” when dealing with the penitent man?

What else does Paul say they are to do in verse 8?

13. In verse 10, Paul directs them to find strength to do this in the same place where he found it. Where is that?

2 Corinthians 2:12–13

14. In what city in Asia Minor would Paul wait for Titus, after he took Paul’s letter to Corinth?

15. How did Paul keep busy there?

16. Why did he go to Macedonia?

17. What was helpful to you in this lesson?



A GLIMPSE INTO THE HEART OF A “MASTER-PASTOR” 2 CORINTHIANS 2:3–4	24
THE GOOD NEWS / BAD NEWS REPORT FROM TITUS 2 CORINTHIANS 2:5–11	25
SLEEPLESS IN TROAS – 2 CORINTHIANS 2:12–13	27
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14–3:18	28

• • • • •

*“God is ready to forgive us so that we might
‘return’ to Him and be reconciled with Him here
and now and be with Him for eternity.”*

• • • • •

PAUL’S PASTORAL CONCERN AT WORK

In the closing verses of chapter 1, Paul struggles to convince his friends in Corinth that it was his love and concern for them, which had “tipped the scale” in favor of making a change in his proposed travel plans. He wrote, “It was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.”

PAUL’S “PAINFUL VISIT”

2 CORINTHIANS 2:1–2

The first verse of chapter two is quite specific about that from which Paul wanted to spare them. The schedule for his next extended visit was changed when Paul made up his mind “not to make another painful visit” to them. What is the apostle referring to here? Did he have in mind his very first missionary visit to Corinth? While there may have been brief episodes of conflict and misunderstanding during this prolonged visit (around two years), it would hardly deserve the label “a painful experience.” (See Lesson One commentary.)

Toward the end of 2 Corinthians (12:14, 13:1–2), Paul refers to his promised trip to Corinth as his third visit. This clearly tells us that there must have been an intermediate visit. It probably was the “painful visit” referred to here. Highly regarded conservative Lutheran scholar, Martin Franzmann, came up with a plausible scenario regarding this visit. In 1 Corinthians 4:16ff, Paul told the congregation to get ready for a visit from his assistant, Timothy. What he writes later in the same

letter (16:10–11), hints at the possibility that Timothy probably would not receive a friendly welcome from them. The fact that Timothy's stay was very short seems to indicate that Paul was correct in his prediction. Timothy returned to Paul and gave him a very disheartening report about the situation. Knowing what we do about Paul's passionate pastoral concern, it shouldn't surprise us to hear that he decided to "drop everything" and head for Corinth. Perhaps such a sequence as this could "fill in the blanks" about an intermediate visit.

This impromptu visit "in person" to Corinth may have had its moments of unpleasantness and sharp confrontation with some of the false teachers, as well as with some of the congregational leaders, who had proved disloyal to Paul. It certainly would have been quite "painful" for all concerned.

Scholars are in agreement that this "troubleshooting" visit was only partially successful. Paul left Corinth without settling matters. Later on, in 2 Corinthians 13:2, he refers to his "second" visit. He reminds them that before he left, he had given them an ultimatum, which was the equivalent of our expression "Get your act together!" He left them a checklist of things that needed to be done.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE HEART OF A "MASTER-PASTOR"

2 CORINTHIANS 2:3–4

In this section we are given a unique glimpse into the personality of the apostle. Paul knew that the emotional wounds needed time to heal! He showed remarkable sensitivity to the human needs of these people who were so dear to him. It was "for their sake" that he delayed his return visit. He is also "up front" about his feelings. He tells them that he simply wasn't ready to put himself through such misery again so soon!

What a great mentor Paul is for all pastors! What comes through "loud and clear" is that there was nothing "impersonal" about his relationship with his people. He was genuinely concerned about them. In modern psychological terminology, he also displayed vulnerability and openness. He let them know that when they hurt, he hurt. At the same time, he was quick to let them know that their accomplishments in the realm of the spiritual were a source of great joy to him!

In verse 3 of chapter 2, Paul mentions that he had written a letter to them, which he knew would not be very pleasant for them to receive. Scholars refer to it as Paul's "severe letter." Some Bible students believe that the letter was 1 Corinthians. A more widely accepted hypothesis, even among conservative Bible scholars, is that there was, in fact, a separate letter, which was written sometime between First and Second Corinthians; a follow-up letter after his impromptu "troubleshooting" visit.

Reference to a "lost letter" really should not disturb us. The phrase "lost" does not mean that it was "lost" to God, or that He had intended to include it in the canonical Scriptures. The evangelist John reminds us that not everything that Jesus said or did is included in his Gospel (John 21:25). John had a record of many other remarkable things which Jesus had done, which did not find a place in his book. Obviously, the Holy Spirit was selective as to what was included in the collection of inspired sacred writings. We can have the utmost confidence that our Bible has in it every Word that God intended it to have. There may be a "lost" letter, but never a "missing" one from God's perspective.

What Paul says in verse 2:5ff seems to refer to an unhappy development that took place after Paul's "second visit." It obviously does not refer to moral laxity, such as incest that was the problem addressed in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5. It had to do

with one individual who had done some kind of injury, which “caused him [Paul] grief.” And, to put it mildly, also “grieved all of you.” That’s all Paul says about the nature of the offense. Paul was justifiably outraged at the intrusion of renegade itinerant teachers who had come promoting their false notions. Very likely, Paul did confront them and in modern parlance, “read the riot act” to them. There wasn’t much else that he could do to these men. However, the focus of the attention here was on an influential member of the congregation, one of their own. It probably was one of the local leaders who continued to lead the opposition against Paul. Whatever it was, the offense was so flagrant that Paul had made it clear to the congregation that this was something with which they had to deal without delay.

Paul opens his heart to them and lets them know that he didn’t take any pleasure in writing this confrontational letter. Rather, he wrote, “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you” (2:4). With this, the apostle gives us all an example of what we today call “tough love.” There are times when we simply can’t avoid unpleasantness and pain for ourselves and for those whom we love dearly. If our love is sincere and genuine we will know when such “tough love” is called for.

THE GOOD NEWS / BAD NEWS REPORT FROM TITUS

2 CORINTHIANS 2:5–11

We don’t have a copy of the report, which Titus gave to Paul when they finally caught up with each other somewhere in Macedonia. However, it isn’t too difficult to reconstruct its basic content. Look at 2 Corinthians 2:5–11. This section implies the good news of repentance on the part of the member of the congregation who had joined forces with the teachers, who had been undermining Paul’s ministry. The bad news, which Titus had to report was that a vocal minority within the congregation was displaying an attitude toward the repentant man, which was “short-circuiting” the outcome that Paul had in mind for the offender. They were holding out for more punishment.

Titus must have reported that the congregation had followed Paul’s directives. Because of the seriousness of the offense that had “grieved” both him and them

(2:5), the group had acted properly in voting some disciplinary action. We have no way of knowing what it was. It could have been that they required him to come before the group and confess publicly that he was guilty of a very serious offense. After all, he had openly challenged an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He had actively advocated false teachings, which had the potential of misleading fellow members from the saving truth of the Gospel. He also may have been asked to step down from any office that he held in the congregation. Whatever the “punishment” consisted of, Titus told Paul that there were some who felt it wasn’t enough!

In a gentle, evangelical, yet firm manner, Paul now addresses this problem. He tells the minority of perhaps well-meaning but misguided parishioners that they should not continue to press for more disciplinary action against the man. He writes (v. 6), “The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him.” Paul is aware that this man was still very much in a “critical” spiritual condition. Things could go either way for him, depending on how his fellow-members related to him. Paul wanted them to see how crucial their role was at this time of spiritual crisis in the man’s life.

Beginning in verse 7, Paul tells them what he would like to see them do. Instead of going with their “gut” feeling that more punishment will help to bring the man around, Paul says: “Instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him.” Paul then points to the real risk that too much punishment might very well overwhelm him. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him” (v. 8). Always the pastor, Paul understood how emotionally “charged” the situation was. He knew that there was always the chance that the man who had been made to see the error of his ways, might become so sorrowful for his sin, that in his mind there was no way God could ever forgive

him. In such a state of mind, it wouldn’t take a lot of rejection from fellow members to push him over the edge into the “slough of despondency,” and right into the clutches of a waiting Satan! He may have remembered what Judas had done.

Paul gives us all a lesson about something that we need to take to heart. When you and I are in similar situations, we will need to look to God for guidance as to when disciplinary action is enough. We will need divine help to discern when we are coming close to that critical stage when more denunciation would be like the proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back.” We will need to be open to the impulse of the Holy Spirit as He prompts us “to forgive and comfort” as Paul instructs us here.

Paul now gives us one more thing that all of us need to understand and take to heart. Clearly, Paul wants his dear people in Corinth to note that in order to be complete; the process of forgiveness includes restoration of the offending person into the fellowship of the church. This should be a clear goal for members of a Christian congregation when dealing with a problem similar to that which faced the church at Corinth. It also has implication for all of us as we deal with those who offend us in the course of our routine interpersonal relationships in the home, at the office, or in the community. Our goal should not simply be to make sure that they know they have “done you wrong,” so that they will figuratively get down on their knees to apologize to you. If it is your goal just to experience the gratification of seeing someone grovel before you, you’ve got it all wrong, according to Paul.

Paul insists that the job wasn’t complete until they had done everything that they could to restore such a repentant offender into Christian fellowship. Each member was directed by Paul to

feel a personal sense of responsibility not only to forgive, but also to “comfort” the repentant person. The word “comfort” here (as in 2 Cor. 1:3–4) goes beyond putting an arm around a person and saying: “There, There! Everything is going to be all right.” It is a dynamic word which means to help someone be strong, or “fortified.” In this case, secure in their faith and loyalty to the Lord and His Church. Paul recommends that the way to get started in this process will be for them to “reaffirm your love for him” (v. 8). The dynamic of God’s kind of love (agape) is the only thing that has the power to bring about healing and full restoration.

This idea of forgiveness is not an innovative teaching in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God’s exhortations to repentance almost always include the thought of His people being in fellowship with Him. “Return to me!” He pleaded in (Hosea 6:1, 14:1; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Jeremiah 24:7). God is ready to forgive us so that we might “return” to Him and be reconciled with Him here and now and be with Him for eternity. Forgiveness is not an end in itself. Forgiveness must include restoration. By His divine love in Christ, who took the punishment for our sin upon Himself, God clears the way for his people to return to Him and be restored in fellowship with Him. Forgive, forget, and restore is the model we are to emulate. It’s a big order. Paul tells them (and us) how he had the strength to do the humanly impossible. He brings Christ into the equation (v. 10) and that makes all the difference in the world. God’s grace empowers us to do it God’s way!

SLEEPLESS IN TROAS

2 CORINTHIANS 2:12–13

Paul asked Titus to deliver this “painful letter,” and then to report to him at Troas. Troas was a port city on the mainland of Asia Minor, just

north of Ephesus. Typical of this apostle with “The Magnificent Obsession” for saving souls, Paul didn’t just sit around in Troas twiddling his thumbs. He immediately began to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the citizens of Troas. Apparently, many people in the area responded favorably to Paul’s proclamation of the Gospel.

In spite of the great joy that must have filled his heart as he contemplated the success of his witnessing in and around Troas, he writes that he “still had no peace of mind.” His deep concern for the spiritual well-being of his friends in Corinth weighed too heavily on his mind and heart. We can be sure that he confided all of this to God in prayer. With God’s approval, then, Paul, “said goodbye to them (his recent converts) and went on to Macedonia.” This move would bring him several days closer to a potential visit with Titus and the news for which he was so desperately waiting. He would have “no peace of mind” until he heard first-hand from Titus how the people in Corinth had responded to his “severe” letter.

And again, what a wonderful example Paul is for both pastors and lay people today! Reaching out to non-Christians surely was Paul’s “forte” — his special God-given gift. Here Paul felt an overwhelming concern for people who were already members of a Christian congregation. Like medical personnel at the scene of a disaster, the apostle did a quick “triage” to assess the comparative vital needs of all concerned. God evidently concurred with his decision that he was most needed as the “key player” in the scenario at Corinth. While adding to the fellowship by bringing in new converts is an exciting experience, ministering to the spiritual needs of those already in the “household of faith” is equally important. Jesus said in John 15:17, “This is my command: Love each other.”

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14–3:18

Father in Heaven, please bless me with the presence of Your Holy Spirit as I turn again to study Your Word. Lead me to a deepening sense of wonder as I consider in a very personal way the true glory of the Gospel. Clear the way in my heart, so that some of that glory may be reflected in my daily walk. Through Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Amen

Review:

1. Suppose you find out that someone in your family has done something that clearly is contrary to the revealed will of God. If you use 2 Corinthians 2:5–11 for guidance, what will you do?

What goals should you have in mind when you speak with someone about a wrongdoing?

- ☐ to realize the seriousness of the offense in the eyes of God.
- ☐ to believe that God will grant full forgiveness.
- ☐ to feel the warmth of my personal acceptance and reconciliation.
- ☐ all of the above

2 Corinthians 2:14–17

2. What does Paul say (v. 14) is the source of his confidence, to give himself wholeheartedly to the Gospel ministry?

Why can you have this same assurance with regard to the Word of God for your own faith and especially as you share God's Word with your family and friends? (Isaiah 55:11; Romans 1:16)

Why do you think Paul refers to "the knowledge of God" as having "fragrance"?

In what way can the fragrant scent of the Gospel be "an aroma of death" for some people?

How does Paul characterize the ministry style of the false teachers who are in it for personal gain (v. 17)? What does he call them?

In contrast to these "hucksters," what is his style?

2 Corinthians 3:1–3

3. What criticism leveled against him by his detractors does Paul address in the opening verses of Chapter 3?

Why does Paul say he didn't need any such papers?

Who wrote his references? (v. 3)

According to Paul, why were his letters "superior" to those of his critics?

When you hear the expression "tablet of stone," what comes to mind?

2 Corinthians 3:4–6

4. In these verses, Paul gives a clear answer to the question he raised in 2:16b. What makes Paul feel "equal to the task"?

Of what does Paul say (v. 6) God made him a minister?

What was the basis of the covenant that was being replaced? (Cp. Exodus 34:10, 27–28)

2 Corinthians 3:7–11

5. To understand a bit more fully Paul's reference to the events surrounding the establishment of the Old Covenant with the Israelites, read Exodus 34:29–35. What happened to the face of Moses?

How bright was it?

How permanent was the glow on Moses face?

6. On what basis could Paul properly refer to the Ten Commandments as a "ministry of death"?
-

In contrast to this, what did he say that the “ministry” of the New Covenant had the power to do? (v. 9)

What gives it such power? Describe the dynamics which makes this happen.

2 Corinthians 3:12–18

7. What does Paul say was another reason Moses covered his face (v. 13)?

Of what did Paul say the “fading” glory was a symbol?

In what way was the “Old Covenant” temporary? (Hebrews 9:14–15)

How do believers under the New Covenant (v. 18) reflect God’s “glory”?



PAUL FLASHES IMPRESSIVE CREDENTIALS 2 CORINTHIANS 3:1–6	33
PAUL HUMBLY GIVES ALL CREDIT TO GOD 2 CORINTHIANS 3:4–6A	34
IMPORTANT THOUGHT ABOUT THE NEW COVENANT 2 CORINTHIANS 3:6B–18	34
THE GREATER GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT 2 CORINTHIANS 3:7–18	35
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 4:1–18	37

“The glory of the New Covenant is that it gives us ‘the right reason’ for wanting to live God-pleasing lives.”

.....

PAUL CELEBRATES THE GOSPEL MINISTRY

In some commentaries, this next section has the title: “The Great Parenthesis.” Paul abruptly breaks into the narrative with a complete change of topic. He takes the role of a cheerleader and calls on his reader to join him in a celebration of the Gospel ministry. Up to this point, the contents of this letter had been a bit depressing. Paul may have sensed this and decided it was time for something a bit more “upbeat.”

A FAVORABLE OUTCOME IS A SURE THING!

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14–17

After Coalition Forces began the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and ground forces started a steady move toward Bagdad, President Bush confidently declared that “the outcome is sure; we just don’t know how long it will take.” In these verses, Paul confidently states a similar thought about the campaign to defeat the forces of evil and to liberate human beings from sin, death, and the tyranny of evil. He calls upon his friends in Corinth to join him in celebrating this great truth. He asks them to give a rousing cheer along with a resounding declaration of thanks to Him, “who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere” (v. 14).

As Paul contemplated the beauty of knowing that the venture to which he had dedicated his life was destined to be successful, the imagery of a “triumphal procession” came to mind. While his readers would easily connect with this imagery, we very likely could use a little help to get the full significance of the symbolism.

The “triumphal procession” mentioned here, refers to the typical victory parade for a conquering ruler’s homecoming. Citizens by the thousands would turn out for the exciting event. They brought flowers to scatter on the pavement ahead of the entourage. Those who could afford it brought incense and spices that they burned as expressions of thanks to their gods, and to add to the festiveness of the occasion.

Continuing with the imagery of the “victory parade,” the apostle Paul gives it a special twist. In the military victory parade, the aroma of crushed flowers on the roadway and the burning spices and incense can trigger two kinds of emotional responses. For all who are on the side of the victorious king — the aroma would be exciting and joyful. It meant that the war was over. Life could return to normal. But there were those for whom the aroma would have just the opposite effect. Trailing behind the victorious generals and troops were the POW’s — soldiers of various ranks from the armies of the vanquished, some chained to chariots, some even in cages. There was nothing pleasant about the aroma that filled their nostrils. It only served to heighten their mental anguish as it reminded them that judgment awaited them and was drawing ever closer with each whiff of perfumed air they breathed.

It was sad, but true, that something so beautiful could mean something so radically different, depending upon the individual relationship to the king who is celebrating the triumph. So, as God looks down on the triumphal procession, the scene is a “bittersweet” experience. Paul says of himself and of those who share in the Gospel ministry, “We are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing” (v. 15). As the aroma of incense in a secular triumphal procession can mean different things to different people, so the Gospel can have a totally different effect upon different people. Like the victory parade, “To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life” (v. 16). Those who respond to the Gospel are a source of joy to God. Those who turn their backs on Christ are a source of real pain and heartache to the loving Father in heaven, “Who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

Paul can’t help but comment on the tremendous responsibility all this represents so he figuratively throws up his hands and says, “And who is equal to such a task?” It reminds him of the situation with which he had to deal in Corinth. The false teachers used a clever “sales pitch” to get people to “buy into” teachings that were not consistent with what Paul had taught them. Paul referred to them as “peddlers” or “hucksters,” terms that his readers knew had negative connotations. What a contrast this was to Paul’s style: “In Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God” (v. 17b).

.....

These people were “living proof” of the authenticity of Paul’s ministry. Their transformed lives were impressive evidence that his ministry in their midst was “of God.”

.....

PAUL FLASHES IMPRESSIVE CREDENTIALS

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1–6

Paul begins this new section with the question: “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?” Paul says, “again” because earlier in the letter he had said something similar (1:12ff). It may be Paul’s way of letting these people know that he is sensitive to the fact that self-commendation really doesn’t carry much weight. Remember, this had been one of the charges that his opponents had leveled against him. Evidently, these slick operators came to the Corinthian congregation armed with impressive “letters of recommendation” from people who lived in a center of international trade. It would be standard protocol checking references for doing business with a stranger. This may very well have been the “sticking point” for the member of the congregation who had taken a stand with the interlopers. It was true. Paul had not presented any letters of reference when he first came to Corinth.

The apostle meets this criticism head on. He says (3:1): “Do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation?” The structure of the sentence in the Greek makes it clear that Paul believed that the answer to the question was a resounding, “No!” Then he goes on to explain why he didn’t need such letters.

With a masterstroke of his pen, Paul makes this very “personal” for his readers. He explains that he didn’t need any written credentials. He had something far more impressive. “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone” (3:2). These people were “living proof” of the authenticity of Paul’s ministry. Their transformed lives were impressive evidence that his ministry in their midst was “of God.” With such credentials, who needed any letter of “recommendation”?

Paul takes this concept and lifts it to an even higher level when he writes in verse three: “You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God.” When Paul pointed to their changed lives as a testimonial to the legitimacy of his ministry, he wanted them to know that this was really a letter that Christ actually wrote. Paul was the human instrument, but their new life had come about because Paul had faithfully proclaimed to them to “write” a letter of recommendation from God Himself, endorsing the ministry of the apostle. It was a letter not written on perishable parchment of flimsy papyrus with ink that fades. It was in God’s

“handwriting” — written by the Spirit of God upon the hearts of believers. Paul is, in effect, saying to his detractors: “You want credentials, I’ll show you credentials! How about a letter of reference from God Himself?”

The terminology that Paul uses here provides him with a perfect segue or lead-in to a discussion of the New Covenant. The reference to “tablets of stone” point to a “watershed event” in the history of Israel — the giving of the Ten Commandments, “inscribed by the finger of God” on stone slabs (Exodus 31:18), which Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai. The people of Israel entered into a covenant with God. He would be their God, and they would be His people.

Paul saw all this as a foreshadowing of the terms of a completely new relationship that would be in effect after the Promised Savior arrived on the scene. Paul reminds them that this was not something he made up. The great prophet Jeremiah had written: “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts” (31:33). Paul says that the New Covenant is now in effect, “Written... not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (3:3). People of the New Covenant will do God’s will “from the heart.” They do it because, with Christ dwelling in them, it comes “naturally” to them.

PAUL HUMBLY GIVES ALL CREDIT TO GOD

2 CORINTHIANS 3:4–6A

Having set forth these remarkable credentials, Paul wants to make certain everyone understands clearly the dynamics involved in all of this. These credentials gave him confidence in his ministry. But now he lets everybody know that this confidence is not from himself. He is

“equal to the task” (2:6), he says, only because “God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant” (3:6a). The American Bible Society’s English Version gets to the point with its translation: “God gives us what it takes to do all that we do.”

IMPORTANT THOUGHT ABOUT THE NEW COVENANT

2 CORINTHIANS 3:6B–18

Apparently, the false teachers who came to Corinth took issue with what Paul had taught to the people regarding the “New Covenant.” In chapter 11:22, Paul refers to them as “Hebrews.” These “carpetbagger” teachers evidently passed themselves off as “super” teachers who gave pre-eminence to the Old Covenant which God had made with His people at Mount Sinai. Before his miraculous conversion, Paul had been an avid proponent of this covenant, even to the point of leading a campaign to exterminate any Jew who taught otherwise. In Philippians 3:4–5, he describes himself as a “super-Pharisee.” He sincerely believed that he could win God’s favor by striving to keep “the letter” of the Law. He realized that no matter how hard he tried, it just wouldn’t work! So he declares, “for the letter kills” (3:6). When people use the Law hoping to establish a favorable relationship with God, the Law itself will condemn them, because no one can keep it perfectly. Those who encourage people in their improper use of the Law are, therefore, engaged in a “ministry of death.”

In contrast, the ministry of the New Covenant begins with the acknowledgment that as glorious as the Old Covenant was, one thing it could not do was to provide salvation. The New Covenant, however, proposed a relationship with God, which is based on God’s grace, which offers full and free immunity because of what Jesus accomplished for us on Calvary. In

• • •

*The ministry of the New Covenant brings
with it the remarkable dynamic of being able
to empower individuals to live a life that is
productive in doing things which please God.*

• • •

response to the unbelievable love which God showed by coming to our rescue like this, a genuine love for God and a powerful desire to please Him generates within us. We are anxious to do what He would like us to do — not to win His favor, but because we know that we already have it! This dynamic defines the New Covenant.

THE GREATER GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT

2 CORINTHIANS 3:7–18

Paul's exuberance for the Gospel ministry continues in this section. The background for what Paul writes here is Exodus 34:29–30, which describes things that happened to Moses in connection with his receiving the Ten Commandments from the hand of God. Paul writes that after Moses had been in the very presence of the Almighty, there was a glow about him. The glow was so bright that "the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory" (v.7). All of this served to reinforce Moses' claim that he had truly been in the presence of God. Paul makes the point that when Moses delivered the tablets of stone which formed the basis for the Old Covenant, the event was accompanied with spectacular and dramatic splendor.

In his attempt to get his people to appreciate the greater glory of the New Covenant, Paul appeals to them to "put their minds in gear." He tells them to stop and think about this. "If the ministry that condemns people is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness?" As wonderful as the Ten Commandments are, they have no power to enable people to observe them. The ministry of the New Covenant brings with it the remarkable dynamic of being able to empower individuals to live a life that is productive in doing things which please God. They aren't trying to get something from God. G.K. Chesterton's observation is quite apropos here: "Is not this life's highest treason to do the right thing for the wrong reason?"

The glory of the New Covenant is that it gives us “the right reason” for wanting to live God-pleasing lives.

In verse 10 and 11, Paul ratchets up his effort to get his readers to appreciate the Gospel message that he had proclaimed to them. He suggests that they might recognize that by comparison, the glory of the Old Covenant is completely blanked out by “the surpassing glory” of the New Covenant. It’s like the time of the month when the moon is full and the night sky is bright. However, when the sun comes and is high in the sky, you no longer see the moon. So it is with the New Covenant, which is so amazing and glorious that it leaves the Old Covenant without any glory by comparison.

The temporariness of the Old Covenant of the Law was symbolized, as Paul says, in the fact that the reflected glory on Moses’ face was fading (vv. 7, 11). Paul reminds us here that Moses was aware of this. In fact, he says Moses “put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away” (v. 13). He wanted them to hold on to the first impression they had received, so their sense of awe and wonder, would be retained, leading them to be more ready to submit to the Law of God.

Speaking of “veils,” Paul adds the thought that “to this day the same veil remains when the Old Covenant is read...even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts” (vv. 14–15). This veil keeps the Jewish people from seeing that the glory of the Old Covenant was fleeting. What was true then is still true today, not only of the Jewish people, but of all who expect to gain God’s favor by the things they do.

There is something that can take away this veil, Paul says. “...only in Christ is it taken away” (v. 14). When this takes place, Paul says in verse 17–18, some great and wonderful things start to happen. When Christ the Lord comes into our hearts, we receive the life-giving Spirit. The bondage and guilt of the Law are removed. And even more important, the power and presence of God which accompanies the New Covenant will reflect in our quality of life. We are made partakers of the glory of Christ and will be “transformed into His likeness, with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (v.18).

Pretty awesome isn’t it — this New Covenant!?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 4:1–18

Lord of my life and God of my salvation, thank You for the apostle Paul, for his determination to bring the Gospel to as many people as possible during his relatively short life on earth. And, especially for the magnificent example of faith and loyalty that he was. Help me to be more like him. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

Review

1. In chapter 3 (vv. 7–18), Paul used the concept of the “veil” in several ways:
Why did Moses put a veil over his face immediately after he came down from the mountain (v. 7)?

Why did he keep the veil over his face (v. 13)?

In verse 15, Paul gives the reason for the inability of the Jews of his day to see the glory of God in Jesus. Where does Paul say the veil is?

How is the veil removed (v. 16)?

What happens to us when we stand before God without any “veil” (v. 18)?

2 Corinthians 4:1

2. What does Paul say moved God to commission him to be an apostle, even though he had once been a notorious persecutor of Christians? (See also: 1 Corinthians 4:15; 1 Timothy 1:12–16; Ephesians 3:7–8)

Can you identify with any aspect of Paul's conversion (Ephesians 2:4–5)?

As you consider the role that God gave to Paul, do you see any similarity with what God expects of you?

What over-riding truth does Paul say enables him not to “lose heart” in spite of the many “disheartening” experiences that came his way?

2 Corinthians 4:2-6

3. In verses 2 & 5, Paul tells about his “style” of ministry. What did he say was his goal?

What did he “renounce?”

What learning is here for us to remember when we witness to Jesus?

If the Word of God is so powerful, why doesn’t it “get through” to some people (vv. 3-4)?

Whose power, does Paul say is involved when the Gospel of Christ is held up in all of its purity (v. 7)? (See also Romans 1:16)

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

4. The apostle Paul continues trying “to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (v. 7). What does he use as an “object lesson” to help them “get the picture”?

Explain how you think this analogy helps to clarify the truth that Paul wants them to understand.

5. Paul emphasized the importance of God’s power in the message he proclaimed. Verses 8-9 illustrate the same thing in the experience Paul had. In the first column list the four circumstances which describe Paul’s vulnerability; in the second, how God’s power rescued him.

1.

1.

2.

2.

3.

3.

4.

4.

6. Paul (vv. 10–11) took this thought one step further. He faced the threat of death just about every day. With whom did he share this experience?

Jesus died. But what does Paul say was the result of Jesus' death?

Paul faced death to his body all the time as he pursued his ministry to them, but in verse 12, what blessing does he say came to them?

2 Corinthians 4:13–18

7. Why didn't Paul just keep quiet?

What else, involving the Corinthians, kept him going (v. 14)?

According to verse 15, what was his ultimate goal?

-
8. When Paul compared the eternal blessings that his faith would bring him, how did he refer to the heap of troubles that came his way on earth and on what did he "focus"?

What lesson do you learn from this?



2 CORINTHIANS

2 CORINTHIANS 4:1–18

 **LIVING WAY**
BIBLE STUDY

THIS CONFIDENCE SHAPED HIS STYLE	
2 CORINTHIANS 4:2	41
WHY DIDN'T THIS POWER ALWAYS WORK?	
2 CORINTHIANS 4:4	42
PAUL'S GOAL IN MINISTRY – 2 CORINTHIANS 4:5–7	43
A STUDY IN CONTRASTS ALL THE WAY	
2 CORINTHIANS 4:8–12	43
THE BASIS FOR DEVOTION TO MINISTRY	
2 CORINTHIANS 4:13–18	44
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1–6:3	46

“We are to represent Christ in our sphere of influence.”



WHAT DROVE PAUL TO PERSEVERE IN HIS MINISTRY?

On July 7, 2003, four-star General Tommy Franks retired from his position as head of the U.S. Central Command — the military unit in charge of the war against terrorism in Iraq. In an interview on “Good Morning America,” Diane Sawyer asked the general how the troops were holding up, considering the fact that soldiers were still “in harm’s way.” “Aren’t they filled with fear?” she asked him. The general explained that his soldiers knew very well that they were “in harm’s way” but, since they were committed to the cause of toppling a brutal regime, his troops didn’t live in fear.

In the section of 2 Corinthians to which we have come in our study, Paul elaborates upon what has kept him going, in spite of the hardships and the ever-present risks to his very life. He was “in harm’s way” all the time, but this didn’t keep him from his commitment to do the job God was expecting him to do.

HE REMEMBERS WHO GAVE HIM THIS “DUTY”

2 CORINTHIANS 4:1

At the beginning of this discourse on why he was able to “hang in there,” even when the going got rough; the apostle states the overriding consideration that God himself had picked him for the job. “Since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.” Paul never forgot that since he had once persecuted followers of Jesus,

it would have been a great thing just to be forgiven for that. What a great heart God must have, not only to forgive him, but to make him His ambassador for Christ to the Gentile world. He counted it his highest privilege in life to serve this God. But, it was not just the sense of privilege that drove Paul. He was also completely confident that God would be with him and would bless his efforts; this kept him so he “did not lose heart.”

You and I can't lay claim to the title “apostle.” However, all of us, by virtue of our calling as Christians, have been given an assignment similar to that given to Paul. We are to represent Christ in our sphere of influence. If we recall how it was that we became eligible for this privilege, we will realize that it was pretty much the same as it was for Paul. It was not something we deserved. It was unbelievable “mercy” on God's part. When we have a sense of this, we begin to understand that it truly is a privilege and an honor to represent the Lord of heaven and earth. Also, like Paul, we can be confident that He will be with us all the way, and will provide us with whatever we might need to accomplish the assignment He gives us. Even though the going gets rough at times, we, too, should never “lose heart!”

THIS CONFIDENCE SHAPED HIS STYLE

2 CORINTHIANS 4:2

Paul goes on to explain how all this shaped the style of his ministry. Because of his confidence that God was working with him and through him, Paul states that he had “renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God” (v. 2a). Very likely, Paul meant to call attention to some of the devious methods that the false teachers were using. Later, in Chapter 11, verse 3, he compared their tactics to the “cunning” of

Satan when he deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. Paul says they didn't hesitate to “distort the word of God.” Incidentally, this is the only place in all of the New Testament that we find this Greek word of “distort.” In secular literature, it was used specifically in reference to the dilution of wine — wine that had been “tampered” with. Paul used this special word to describe the practice of the false teachers. In some cases, they may have “watered it down” to take the “edge” off some words of Scripture. It may also refer to their practice of commingling the truth with elements of other religious or philosophical ideas that were floating around the city at that time.

Paul wants his readers to know that he “renounced” any temptation to tamper with the Word. He strove to maintain the absolute purity and integrity of the Gospel at all costs! He also declares that he always gave it his best effort to speak the truth as clearly as possible; “we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God” (v. 2b). The American Bible Society's Commentary Version gets to the heart of what Paul wanted to convey: “God is our witness that we speak only the truth, so that others will be sure we can be trusted.” Notice that Paul again uses a mild oath, showing how important an item this was for them to keep in mind.

The lesson in this for us to remember is that when we witness to others, the effectiveness of our witness does not depend upon the cleverness with which we present our witness. The power is in the truth of the Gospel. Like Paul, we should strive to make the truth as clear as possible so that people will pick up the image of Christ as the only Savior from sin. This is where the power is. Jesus said it: “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). See also Romans 1:16.

.....

Lately, it seems that “the god of this age” has been successful in getting a widespread acceptance for the notion that all religions are on the same level of value and truth.

.....

WHY DIDN'T THIS POWER ALWAYS WORK?

2 CORINTHIANS 4:4

Paul realized that even though God was with him, and no matter how faithful he was to God's Word, not all who heard him preach were going to respond favorably. He wanted his friends in Corinth to realize the failure of a good response did not mean that Paul was not doing a good job, as his opponents were telling them. If the all-powerful Gospel did not get through to everyone who heard it clearly, this wasn't the fault of the Gospel, nor was it necessarily the fault of the one who proclaimed it.

To clarify this point: Paul picks up on the concept of a “veil” to which he had referred a few verses earlier (3:14–18). He said there was a veil covering the hearts of his fellow countrymen that kept the light of the Gospel from getting through to them. Here he generalizes this metaphor to describe another kind of blockage. He writes: “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (v. 4). Paul reminds them that there is a diabolical force at work — “the god of this age,” which is another name for Satan, the ultimate spiritual “terrorist.”

Satan will use any means at his disposal to block the influence of God in the lives of people. He will commandeer good things and use them for his nefarious purposes. With some, he leads them to evaluate human wisdom or philosophy to the point where they demand that every idea must be “reasonable.” Others “go with the flow” of the culture around them. For them, it may be pleasures, riches, or fame that are given such priority that they never get around to thinking about their relationship with God. Lately, it seems that “the god of this age” has been successful in getting a widespread acceptance for the notion that all religions are on the same level of value and truth. He has taken the concept of “tolerance” and twisted its meaning to convey the notion that there is no such thing as absolute truth, and for people who believe there is, they are horribly out-of-step with the rest of “enlightened humanity.”

Nothing is sacred or “off-limits” for Satan. His favorite tactic involves the Christian religion itself. He manipulates basic Christian truths so that they block the Gospel. He appeals to human pride and the basic instinct of the unenlightened person. No matter how clearly they hear the Gospel, and how emphatically they recite the Apostles’ Creed, in their hearts they believe that they win God’s favor by doing good things; going to church, helping the poor, etc. When people base their relationship with God on what “they do,” they are blinded to the glory of Christ. Paul reminds us that this “mental block” isn’t accidental. It is masterminded by Satan, the “god of this age.” He is a relentless terrorist dedicated to sabotaging the Kingdom of God. His tactics make Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda look like rank amateurs!

PAUL’S GOAL IN MINISTRY

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5–7

In these next verses, Paul tells us in the proverbial “nutshell” what his central message is. His opponents in Corinth spread the propaganda that Paul was just another egomaniac who wanted to be the “big cheese” in the congregation. Paul began his statement with the disclaimer that no matter what these false teachers were saying, it was never his idea to promote himself. On the contrary, the “bottom line” in every message was to proclaim the Gospel in a way that his hearers would be led to believe in “Jesus Christ as Lord.” He wasn’t interested in “promoting” himself. All he wanted to do was to be “their servant for Jesus’ sake.”

Paul thought his function was that of a reflector. When you are driving on a highway at night, you notice markers along the roadside. In the darkness, you can’t see them until they pick up light from your headlights. Paul says the primeval light of the creation

was the result of God’s directive (Genesis 1:3), so it was an act of God that caused the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (v. 6) to shine into his heart. The light came from God.

His involvement was simply that of a reflector — that was all he ever wanted to be!

Verse 7 is “vintage” Paul. In an oft-quoted illustration, he goes on to describe how insignificant he considered his role in this entire process. He refers to the darkness-dispelling truth as a “treasure.” Many scholars feel that since the discussion was about “light piercing darkness,” Paul was probably thinking about earthenware lamps (“vessels” KJV), as opposed to the lamps of brass or precious metals. The lamps made of clay were utilitarian and cheap. They were considered “disposable,” similar to Styrofoam, or plastic products of our day. It was the oil they contained that had value as a source of light. At any rate, Paul wanted to share with his friends how he felt about his role in spreading the “light of the Gospel.” He thought of himself as a “throw-away” clay lamp. It was the light-giving Gospel which he proclaimed that had value. Through this graphic analogy, Paul hopes they will get his point that “this all-surpassing power is from God, not from us.”

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

ALL THE WAY

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8–12

Paul continues along the same line of thought suggested by his object lesson of the “jars of clay.” He gives four more examples of the contrast between the power of God and his frailty. These examples seem to expand upon some of the hardships he mentioned earlier (1:8–11):

- 1) “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed.” The Greek word suggests the frightening picture of a wall closing in.
- 2) “Perplexed, but not in despair.” There were times when Paul’s head was spinning, and he didn’t know which way to turn.
- 3) “Persecuted, but not abandoned.” Paul was often singled out as a target for mental and physical abuse.
- 4) “Struck down, but not destroyed.” In his translation, J.B. Phillips puts it succinctly: “Knocked down, but not knocked out.”

The only reason he survived all of the above was God’s powerful help.

Lest his reader thinks Paul was appealing to them for sympathy or a special medal of honor, he reminds them that this all fits into God’s “scheme of things.” Paul explains that it may have seemed terrible for him to endure, but it really wasn’t all bad. By contrast, his vulnerability and mortality provided the occasion for a brilliant display of Christ’s power: “so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body” (v. 11). What he writes in verse 12 might seem like an afterthought for Paul. In reality, it could have been the “punch-line.” In the final contrast, he wrote: “So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.” Though he faced death every day as he went about his ministry, the message he proclaimed brought life to them — spiritual and eternal life. Realization of this truth made Paul’s life pretty exciting.

THE BASIS FOR DEVOTION TO MINISTRY

2 CORINTHIANS 4:13–18

Paul now wraps up this topic by listing four factors that accounted for his strong resolve. The first is summed up in a statement made by the author of Psalm 116. He said, “I believed and so I spoke!” So, says Paul, it was with him. In spite of hardships, Paul’s faith in God would not allow him to keep quiet about the Good News, which his Master had commissioned him to share with the world.

The second factor which strengthened him in the face of harsh tactics and tried to shut him up, was his confidence that God, “who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, would also raise us with Jesus.” He had personal experience with the risen Lord. The power of the Resurrection surged within Paul, making him quite “cavalier” about the forces of evil that dogged his footsteps every inch of the way.

The third powerful reason that drove him, he wrote, was his conviction that what he had to share was something that they desperately needed to know. Paul made it very personal for them. Because they accepted his message, he knew that God would raise him up, and they too, would find life eternal. “[God] will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit” (vv. 14–15). His love and concern for their spiritual and eternal welfare drove him to keep going!

His concern didn’t stop with them. Paul knew that this was just the start of a “chain-

● ● ● ● ●

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” Paul wanted his people to share his worldview. Through his letter, he recommends it to us today!

● ● ● ● ●

reaction.” As they lived and shared the faith, the transforming power of the Gospel would be passed on to those around them. More and more people would be saved. An ever-growing and never-ending tidal wave of “thanksgiving” would rush heavenward. Ultimately, the over-arching reason for all that Paul did with such enthusiasm and perseverance was so it would “overflow to the glory of God” (v. 15). That was what Paul really cared about!

There were two other things Paul counted on. First, his experience taught him that he could count on God to sustain him: “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (v. 16). Second, for Paul it simply made good sense. Paul pursued his ministry with total dedication and unswerving loyalty because he was aware of the great “retirement plan” that was in force in him. He had the insight to recognize how valuable and how wonderful it would be for him. Put all of the short-lived earthly hardships in one column and put the blessings of eternity in another. By comparison, the negative experiences aren’t even worth mentioning! Do the math!

Paul’s use of “so” at the beginning of verse 18 implies the conviction that this is the only attitude that makes any sense: “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” Paul wanted his people to share his worldview. Through his letter, he recommends it to us today!

PERSONAL APPLICATION*2 CORINTHIANS 5:1–6:2*

Please, Lord, use this Bible study to impress upon me the truth about the fleeting nature of my life on earth. Help me to develop an ever-growing appreciation of the beauty and wonder of the eternal life which You have prepared for me in heaven. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, My Savior. Amen.

Review

1. What do you know about how the twelve Apostles died? List what you know.

In the 20th century, more Christians have been martyred than in all of the previous 1900 years combined. Does this continue today in the 21st century?

What would you do if you were told: “Deny Christ or die”?

What does Paul say in 4:18 that gave him the strength to stand firm in the faith in spite of the threat to his life?

2 Corinthians 5:1–8

2. What is the common analogy that Paul refers to concerning the temporary nature of our physical bodies?

In contrast, what does he call the new “housing” for our souls in heaven?

Do you think God will have to hunt for our earthly remains on the Last Day to give us our heavenly “bodies?” Check out what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:38. What will God do?

3. As Paul contemplated the glory and beauty of the new life in heaven with the Lord, what kind of feelings often came over him? (vv. 2, 8)

Do you think its “morbid” for Christians to focus on death?

At what point might it become “spiritually detrimental”?

Explain a personal spiritual benefit you may receive when you attend a Christian funeral.

2 Corinthians 5:9–12

4. According to verse 9, what blessing did Paul receive as he thought about the temporariness of life on earth?

What does this teach us about our life pattern? How should we regard each day the Good Lord allows us to stay here on earth?

In verse 10, Paul mentions an important event that should motivate us to take an interest in doing things that will please God. What is it?

What does Jesus have to say on this subject in Matthew 6:19–20? What does He encourage His followers to do?

5. In verse 11, Paul mentions something that gives him an incentive to “go all out” in his effort to convince people of the truth of the Gospel. What is it?

Do you think Paul was afraid of God? Did he do what God wanted him to do to avoid punishment?

6. According to verse 12, how does Paul want his readers to regard him and his ministry in their midst?

On his behalf, what did he hope they would find in their hearts to do?

2 Corinthians 5:13–15

7. What do you think Paul’s detractors had in mind when they accused him of being “Out of his mind”? Check out: Acts 9:3–6, 16:9–11, 17:19, 22:17–18, 23:11, 26:22–24, 27:23; 2 Corinthians 12:1–6; and Mark 3:21 [Jesus].
-

What explanation does Paul give (v. 14) to the charge that he sometimes got “carried away” in his zeal for the Gospel?

What does Paul say (v. 15) was the ultimate purpose God had in mind in sending Christ to “die for all” mankind?

2 Corinthians 5:16–6:2

8. What dramatic “attitude change” did Paul experience after his conversion (vv. 16–19)?

What does he call himself in verse 20? What is the significance of this term?

What is his urgent plea? (5:20)

How does the quote from 2 Corinthians 6:2 give an added sense of urgency to Paul's appeal?



PAUL BRINGS A NEW “WORLDVIEW”	
2 CORINTHIANS 5:6–8	50
OUR LIFE HERE TAKES ON NEW IMPORTANCE	
2 CORINTHIANS 5:9	51
WHAT WE DO COUNTS ON JUDGMENT DAY	
2 CORINTHIANS 5:10	51
THIS EXPLAINS PAUL’S RESOLVE	
2 CORINTHIANS 5:11–15	52
NEW ATTITUDES TOWARD PEOPLE	
2 CORINTHIANS 5:16–17	53
GOD REACHES OUT THROUGH CHRIST	
2 CORINTHIANS 5:18–19	53
PAUL’S URGENT APPEAL – 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20–6:2	53
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 6:3–7:4	54

PAUL’S STRONG FAITH KEEPS HIM GOING

In the opening verses of chapter five, Paul shares with us his personal view of how he faced the prospect of death. He gives people who share his faith a clear picture of what they can expect when their life on earth comes to an end.

HOW WE ARE TO THINK ABOUT DEATH

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1–5

The Greek word that Paul uses for “tent” shows that he intended to focus on the temporary nature of earthly bodies (cp. 2 Peter 1:13). Like his colleague, Peter, he may have sensed that he didn’t have much time left on this earth. His intuition was right on target. Shortly after he wrote this letter he was beheaded by a Roman executioner. Still, he was calm because he was confident that God had plans to replace his temporary earthly body with a body that would be “a building from God, an eternal house in heaven.”

For the educated people of Corinth, at that time, the idea of personal “immortality” wasn’t a new or novel idea. Greek philosophers strongly supported the concept of the immortality of the soul. When he talked about his dread of “being found naked” (vv. 2–3), Paul wanted them to understand that his viewpoint was radically different from that of the Greek philosophers. The idea of being a “disembodied soul” was something that Paul abhorred! In verse four, Paul reverses the age-

old imagery of death and the grave being the “Great Swallower.” This time, “what is mortal may be swallowed up by life!” The Spirit puts this hope into our hearts, “guaranteeing what is to come” (v. 5).

With this sure hope within him, Paul says, it was only natural that there would be times in his life when he would “groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (v. 2). If we consider this statement in the light of what Paul wrote in Romans 8:18–24, we can see that when he talks here about “groaning,” it wasn’t a groaning because of some physical or mental anguish. Rather, this Greek word points to the idea of deep longing and yearning for something special in the future.

Such yearning can become quite intense for people who don’t have much to look forward to here on earth. Think of the Black slaves in America, just a few generations back. The thought of death as “deliverance” from their hopeless situation dominates their “spirituals.” They longed to “cross over Jordan” to the “Promised Land.” They anxiously awaited the “Sweet Chariot” of death that would be “comin’ for to carry me home.”

Perhaps there is a parallel to this in our day. Recent demographic studies show that the average lifespan of people in the U.S. has just about doubled from what it was one hundred years ago. This has been a mixed blessing for some. Many live their later years in an existence that doesn’t have much to offer them. We can understand it when we hear them say that they are “groaning” within themselves, yearning to be “taken home.” Paul’s point is that it’s okay to have such yearning; but not just as an escape from the drudgery of earthly life. For Paul, it was always his contemplation of the beauty and wonder of the new life with God in heaven which triggered

this longing. Such longing is appropriate for us whatever our age.

PAUL BRINGS A NEW “WORLDVIEW”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:6–8

Paul’s firm belief about life beyond the grave gave him a completely new and even radical “worldview.” It was an outlook on life that gave prominence to the truth that our life isn’t limited to just the years we spend here on earth. In verse 6, Paul makes it clear that for believers there is more – lots more – awaiting them when they take leave of earth. He adds that life beyond the grave will be far better than anything we have experienced on earth. Embedded in this statement is the admonition that we need to keep our priorities in order. Remember, “that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.” The obvious implication is that we should be careful not to let ourselves feel so “at home” in this earthly existence that we forget the eternal dimension our life has. We need to make sure that we keep our worldview in sharp focus, says Paul (v. 7). We need to have a sense of incompleteness of our life on earth and factor it in when we make important decisions. Like Paul, we should even savor the idea that deep down in our hearts we would “prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (v. 8).

Some people might think that this is a little morbid. On the contrary, it is a spiritually healthful exercise to think about this awesome reality and to talk about it with family and friends. Some people shy away from attending funerals because they don’t want to think about death. Christian funerals provide “tailor-made” opportunities to do what Paul encourages. Lately, the term “celebration of life” has come into vogue as a way to put a different “spin” on death. Christians don’t need such a “spin.” They can look death in the eye and accept its reality. In the light of God’s promises, they already have a “positive spin,” and

see it as a door through which we pass into life everlasting. Funerals become a celebration of a new and more glorious life that never ends.

OUR LIFE HERE TAKES ON NEW IMPORTANCE

2 CORINTHIANS 5:9

The surprising twist to all this is that our life on this earth takes on a new and even greater sense of importance, says Paul. “So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it” (v. 9). Our Savior included this thought in the prayer He taught us to pray. The Third Petition is: “Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.” In this petition, we ask God to help us make our lives count for Him, to make it our goal to think of each day as an opportunity for service to Him. Paul tells us that our days on this earth, “away from the Lord,” take on a new significance. We don’t try to escape from life. On the contrary, Paul reminds us that we are to look upon each day as an opportunity to immerse ourselves in life, taking full advantage of every opportunity to please God.

WHAT WE DO COUNTS ON JUDGMENT DAY

2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

Paul continues this thought in verse 10. He presents us with another powerful reason for wanting to make the most of each day the Good Lord gives us on this earth. He declares that there will be a day in which all of us will be summoned to appear before God for a “performance evaluation.” He wrote, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” The purpose of our appearance, says Paul, “that each may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body.” Wait a minute! Isn’t that contrary to what Paul teaches elsewhere? Doesn’t he say in no uncertain terms that our good works will not be factored in when it comes to qualifying for eternal salvation? Yes! Good works are totally irrelevant

in the matter of gaining entrance to God’s World.

What Paul writes here is very much in line with the description Jesus gave of what will happen when He comes as Divine Judge at the end of time (Matthew 25:31). In the forensic scene depicted here, Jesus pointed to the good deeds which had been done by believers as visible evidence of the reality of the invisible faith-relationship of those who had already experienced His favor in Christ Jesus. It also hints strongly at the idea that the Father is looking for evidence. In this statement, Paul takes this thought a step further. If our lives show the evidence of God living within us, it is not only vindication for God; but Paul emphasizes that it can make a difference for us as well. On this Day of Judgment when we take our stand before the Lord, Paul says, “that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” Paul clearly teaches that there will be “rewards” in heaven for the good a person has done here on earth.

As we consider this, we need to remember that Paul is using an earthly metaphor in his effort to elucidate a heavenly truth. The idea that there will be some people in heaven who have more blessedness than others might strike us as totally unacceptable. Wouldn’t that make heaven similar to a Boy Scout Jamboree where individual achievements are recognized by colorful badges and patches proudly displayed? How would that come across for those who hadn’t achieved much for God on earth, especially for those who, through no fault of their own, came to “know the Lord” late in life? Let’s make certain that we understand clearly what Paul is saying and especially what he is not saying here! He wants us to always remember that we are saved by *God’s Grace Alone*. He also wants us to be keenly aware of the tremendous value which God places on the personal performance of His people during their stay on planet earth.

Paul seems to echo what Jesus said (Matthew 6:20) to encourage his disciples to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Investing time and energy in that which pleases God will prove to be a sound investment, yielding a great return in the hereafter, “where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:20). Think of it this way: People of all levels of musical skill may attend and enjoy a concert by a master piano player. The pleasure experienced will vary depending on previous involvement with music. The person who has struggled with, and finally mastered a piece, will have a greater enjoyment than one who hears the number for the first time. This is very personal and individual, and it does not in any way detract from the pleasure that another concert-goer enjoys. The more we “invest” of ourselves in the kingdom of God on earth, the more wonderful heaven will be for us!

THIS EXPLAINS PAUL’S RESOLVE

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11–15

It is against the background of the previous verses that Paul goes on to explain to his readers why he is so resolute about his ministry to them. When he says (v. 11) that he knows “what it is to fear the Lord,” he is not telling them that he does things on their behalf because he is afraid of God’s displeasure if he “goofs off.” Rather, his reason is a positive one: He does things because of his high regard for God. He sincerely wants to please God in his ministry.

As Paul focuses on his performance and his motivation he once again makes the “disclaimer,” he isn’t trying to promote himself. He was aware that his detractors were “ready to pounce” on anything he wrote to throw it back in his face... anything to make him look bad in the eyes of the Corinthians. He hopes they remember his impeccable ministry, and be ready to “stick-up” for him. He wanted to give them “an opportunity

to take pride” in him, so they could “answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than what is in the heart” (v. 12).

In verse 13, Paul takes on his detractors concerning one of the serious charges they had brought against him. We can’t be certain what they meant when they accused him of being “out of his mind.” They probably knew about his vision on the Road to Damascus and other similar ecstatic “happenings” which he had reported (cp. Acts 26:24, 22:17; 2 Corinthians 12:1–4). His enemies may have used such information in two ways. First, they may have accused him of using these ecstatic experiences in an attempt to impress his hearers, showing that he had a “special connection” with God. A second possibility was to point to the “out of body” experiences as a sign of emotional and/or mental instability. Paul’s explanation was quite simple. He did not deny that they happened. He said, in effect, that these were very special and rare personal experiences and that they were private; just between he and God. They weren’t essential to the clear and “down to earth” (literally) message he had for them.

The driving force behind his enthusiastic and zealous ministry had nothing whatsoever to do with trying to impress his hearers. Here is what he wanted to impress them with: the magnitude of the all-inclusive love of God. God’s love was for all humanity. Here was the answer to the spiritual need of all people. Christ “died for all” (v. 14). This message had power to change the hearts of all people and give direction to their aimless and self-centered lives. “He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (v. 15). So, once again, as Paul refers to the powerful effect that the Gospel had on him and the direction his life took, he instructs us on the effect it should have on us.

NEW ATTITUDES TOWARD PEOPLE*2 CORINTHIANS 5:16–17*

Paul explains that his entire inner being experienced an “extreme makeover.” His natural attitude toward others had been miraculously transformed. He saw other people in a totally different light; the light of otherworldly discernment. All human beings were objects of God’s love — every last one of them! No individual was being “left behind” in God’s Great Plan of Salvation. Paul tried to look at others through the eyes of God and it made a radical difference in how he thought of them. If they were so valuable to God, they had to be valuable to him also!

GOD REACHES OUT THROUGH CHRIST*2 CORINTHIANS 5:18–19*

In these verses, Paul rehearses the goal which he sincerely believed God had in mind. The word “reconcile” is used several times to describe God’s intentions. It is quite clear that God is not going after people to make sure that they were properly punished for their transgressions. Nor was He interested in getting them to assent to a set of religious ideas. Something had to be done about sin if the relationship between God and His creatures was going to be restored. Paul says God took the initiative. Because of what Christ had done, God was able to dismiss the sin, “not counting men’s sins against them” (v. 19).

PAUL’S URGENT APPEAL*2 CORINTHIANS 5:20–6:2*

Paul wants the people to think of him as an ambassador for God Himself, “as though God were making his appeal through us.” It is really God who is speaking when Paul says: “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” Your sin won’t stand in the way because “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, [Paul includes himself] so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (v. 21). What a clear statement of the vicarious atonement, sometimes written “At-one-ment!”

The opening verses of chapter six repeat the sense of urgency. Don’t delay your response. You may not get another chance. “I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” If you haven’t thought of your faith as that which enables you to have a personal relationship with God, it’s not too late! But, do not delay! Ask the Holy Spirit to bring you to that blessed state! He will!

PERSONAL APPLICATION*2 CORINTHIANS 6:3–7:4*

Thank You, Father in Heaven, for all that You did through Jesus to clear the way for me to once again be one of Your children. Give me a strong determination to have all my attitudes and behavior reflect the wonderful truth that I am related to You. Amen.

Review

1. What is the biggest barrier that keeps God from being in a happy relationship with people? (5:19–21)

How did He remove that barrier? (5:15)

What do people have to do? (5:18–20)

What does God say will happen in the lives of people who sincerely respond to His invitation to be restored in their relationship with Him? (5:15; Romans 1:17)

2 Corinthians 6:3–7

2. Why does Paul consider it so important to defend himself concerning his performance as a minister of the Gospel? (6:3)

How might Paul's reference to "hardships" serve to show the authenticity of his ministry? (Matthew 10:24; Acts 20:19)

What do you think Paul meant by "weapons...in the right hand and in the left?"

2 Corinthians 6:8–10

3. In verses 8–10, Paul used a popular literary form featuring couplets of antithetical concepts. Pick one of the couplets and describe how both of these seemingly opposite concepts could be true. (e.g. "having nothing, yet possessing everything." — Paul didn't own much more than the clothing he wore, yet because of his faith in Jesus he possessed priceless spiritual blessings — Acts 3:6; Romans 8:32). Include Scripture references wherever possible.
-

2 Corinthians 6:11–13

4. What “blanket” criticism does Paul level against his former parishioners in Corinth (v. 12)?

Paul tries to convey to them the gentle “spirit” in which he offers this criticism. What does he call them in v. 13?
_____ How does he want them to think of him? _____

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:4

5. What “fatherly” advice does Paul give to his people in verse 14?

In the context of their recently restored relationship with him, what was Paul afraid could happen again if they were to continue in close relationship with the false teachers?

In the context of their relationship with God, why is his advice so important?

According to the Scripture Paul quotes in v. 16, how does God think about our relationship with Him?

In verse 18, God speaks of an even closer relationship with Him. “I will be a...

6. Over the years, various groups have interpreted Paul’s statement to mean that they should shut themselves off completely from the rest of the world. List some of these that you can recall.
From N.T. Times?

From the Middle Ages?

In American History?

Do you think God wants us to cut ourselves off from any contact with unbelievers? Why or why not?

Do the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:13–16 shed any light on the subject?

Personalize the principle which Paul gives in 7:1. "I will stay clear of any relationship which...

What is Paul's heartfelt plea to the people of Corinth?

How great did Paul say his love for them was (7:3-4)?

POSITIVE QUALITIES OF PAUL'S MINISTRY	
2 CORINTHIANS 6:6–7	58
THE IRONY OF IT ALL – 2 CORINTHIANS 6:8–10	59
PAUL'S EMOTIONAL APPEAL – 2 CORINTHIANS 6:11–13	59
SOME ADVICE ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS	
2 CORINTHIANS 6:14 – 7:1	59
PAUL'S FINAL PLEA FOR FULL ACCEPTANCE	
2 CORINTHIANS 7:2–4	62
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 7:5–8:12	63

“In light of God’s promises to be with us, in this personal and intimate way, and out of reverence for God, ‘let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.’”



PAUL'S MINISTRY — AN INSPIRATION

PAUL'S FAITHFULNESS IN DIFFICULT TIMES

2 CORINTHIANS 6:3–5

In our previous lesson, we noted that Paul reminded his former parishioners in Corinth that he was God's ambassador. As God's personal representative, he was to inform them that in Christ Jesus, God had cleared the way for them to be reconciled with their Maker (5:19–20). In the opening verses of chapter 6, he stresses the urgency of responding to God's gracious invitation. To get the attention of his readers, Paul twice used the Greek word usually translated “Behold” (v. 2). It has the force of our “Listen Up!” Paul wanted them to “get the message” that this was not something they could put off to another day. Twice he also said “Now!” to emphasize how important it was for them to act *immediately*!

Paul must have suspected that there were probably a few in Corinth who still needed some reassurance about his trustworthiness. He now devotes a short paragraph to deal with this concern. He tells them to please take an objective look at the record of his ministry. If they did, they would see that he had “put no stumbling block in anyone's path so that our ministry will not be discredited” (6:3). The Greek word here translated “no” has the force of an emphatic “NO!” There is “absolutely no” dereliction of duty on Paul's part.

On the contrary, writes Paul, the record shows that his ministry as a servant of God was commendable in every respect (6:4). His rehearsal of the quality of his ministry resembles what he had written in chapter 4:8–12. The apostle refers to all that he had endured through a set of three triads. In the first (v. 4), he mentions things which are quite general: “troubles, hardships and distresses.” In verse 5a, Paul mentions specific examples: “in beatings, imprisonments, and riots,” all things that “happened to him.” The final triad seems to point to those things that Paul took upon himself voluntarily: “in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger” (5b). He wanted the people in Corinth to see this as evidence of total dedication to his ministry. He hoped that this would remove lingering doubts about his trustworthiness.

POSITIVE QUALITIES OF PAUL’S MINISTRY

2 CORINTHIANS 6:6–7

As dramatic as it sounds, Paul’s rehearsal of what he had endured for the sake of the Gospel, wasn’t nearly as impressive as the positive qualities which were strongly in evidence as he ministered to them. Paul writes next about his impeccable moral integrity and the characteristics he demonstrated as a personal emissary of the Most High God.

First on the list for Paul is his personal “purity” (v. 6). The Greek word that Paul used for “purity” has its roots in the word that the Septuagint used when it referred to the Nazarites. Numbers 6:2 informs us that Nazarites “took a vow of separation to the Lord.” Perhaps the most famous Nazarite was Samson (Judges 13). If we keep this in mind, we will better understand what Paul is trying to say here. We know he was not about to say that he was “pure,” in the sense that he never sinned. In 1 Timothy 1:15, he calls himself the worst “(chief: KJV) of sinners.” Yet, when it came to

his apostleship, he was as dedicated to the Lord as a Nazarite. He was truly a person totally “set apart” to do God’s bidding.

The record will also show that Paul’s personal characteristics reflected the mindset of the God whom he represented. At all times, he displayed “understanding, patience and kindness.” Lest someone thinks he’s boasting about himself, Paul quickly makes the disclaimer that if he has the “right stuff” for his divine mission, he can’t take any credit for it. He declares that these traits were “gifts of the Holy Spirit,” and have their roots in the Love of God shown to him by Jesus Christ (v. 6).

He expressed this mindset “in truthful speech and in the power of God” (v. 7). The linkage of the “power of God” to the words Paul spoke suggests that the concept Paul wanted to share in this context was more than just the idea that “he never spoke falsely.” He knew that the primary objective of his ministry was to proclaim faithfully the Word which God had imparted to him — the pure Gospel! This is what led him to declare in his letter to the Romans (1:16 KJV): “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation!”

Paul “wraps up” this thought with the imagery of a military campaign. He asserts that he used “weapons of righteousness.” It’s a blanket statement about the quality and integrity of everything that he did as he worked to advance the Kingdom of God. When he speaks of the weapons “in the right hand and in the left,” Paul, very likely, has in mind a typical soldier of that day. The soldier was properly equipped for battle when he had a sword (offensive) in his right hand and a shield (defensive) in his left. All of his tactics and all of his “tools of the trade” qualify as being appropriate (“righteous”) in the eyes of his “Commander-in-Chief.”

THE IRONY OF IT ALL

2 CORINTHIANS 6:8–10

In the remaining verses of this paragraph, Paul appears to be reaching out to those still not quite sure about him. He lets them know that he understands why they might have been a bit ambivalent about their feelings toward him. His detractors had a lot of impressive ammunition at hand to try to “shoot him down.” Starting with verse 8, Paul mentions some of the negative impressions that they may have gotten regarding him. From a human point of view, Paul had some pretty “bad press.” The conventional wisdom of the day pictured him as a person of “dishonor, bad report...impostor...unknown.”

From another point-of-view, just the opposite could be said about each of the negative labels some had put on him. In reality, Paul had good reports. He was “genuine” and he was “well-known.” Paul himself observed such apparent contradictions and contrasts in his experiences. He comments: “dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (vv. 6–10). It all depends on your viewpoint.

PAUL’S EMOTIONAL APPEAL

2 CORINTHIANS 6:11–13

In this section, Paul provides insight on his experiences in the ministry and reason for his emotional outburst. He wanted to “showcase” the depth of his love for these Corinthians and to let them know he was deeply hurt that they were not returning that love. Paul said he had spoken with complete candor and had really “opened up” to them. This experience also made him aware of the depth and extent of his affection for them. He calls them, “my children,” making a fervent appeal for a “fair exchange” in which they would reciprocate (v. 13). He begs them “Open wide your hearts also.”

SOME ADVICE ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14 – 7:1

There is a strong feeling in some circles that Paul did not write this paragraph. They point to the sudden change of subject matter and the observation that there are at least eight words used here which do not appear anywhere else in Paul’s writings. Yet, if we remember Paul had just finished his emotional appeal to the

Corinthians to “open their hearts” to him, we can see that there is a completely logical sequence for what might seem to be out of context. Ever the pastor, Paul realized the danger of being too free in opening one’s heart to another. In fact, this might be a subtle hint from him that they had not been as careful as they should have been concerning the “con artists” who turned them against their former pastor.

His first bit of advice is: “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.” Paul looks for support to a passage from the Old Testament. God had used a variety of ceremonial regulations to help his people to “get the picture” of how He wanted them to think about their special relationship with Him. This particular injunction from Deuteronomy 22:10 said: “Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together.” You wonder if any self-respecting Israelite farmer would need such a directive. At best, it would be a ridiculous sight to see a tiny Palestine donkey taking its place under a cumbersome yoke, paired with a huge ox triple its weight and height. With this cartoon-like scene, God wants to “highlight” a serious truth about the uniqueness of God’s “chosen ones.” They were to be a “people” completely “set apart” — not a “mixture!”

Paul may have been thinking about the way in which he believed his beloved people in Corinth had been “charmed” into listening to the itinerant teachers who had come to their church. They were pretty “slick operators.” Or he may simply have had in mind his assessment of the very dangerous “spiritual climate” in Corinth. With the picture of a “yoke,” Paul has in mind a close intimate relationship. The idea of a believer being joined together in a close and intimate personal relationship with a non-believer makes as much sense as yoking together a small donkey with a large muscular ox. Not only would it be non-productive; it would be risky and dangerous for all involved.

In many ways, Christians today may need this warning even more than the believers in Paul’s day. For us as individuals, Paul’s advice raises a red flag about any carelessness on our part as we move into personal and close relationships. Parents of teenagers and young adults instinctively and rightfully are concerned about the character and upbringing of the friends with whom their offspring “hang out.” But it’s not only impressionable youth who need this admonition. People of all ages are susceptible to influences that could put their relationship with God “at risk.” The apostle Paul is quite specific here when he cautions against the believers being “yoked together with unbelievers.” The very phrase “intimate relationships” calls to mind the closest and most intimate of all relationships — that of marriage. No matter how much pastors counsel young people about the risks of developing close ties with someone who is not a believer, so many young people don’t take this seriously. They’re convinced that “love will conquer all.” Thank God, some have led unbelieving partners “to the Lord.” Some are able, with the Holy Spirit’s help, to remain true to their God. But more often, the believer’s faith and loyalty are seriously compromised.

Although close personal relationships may be the most influential, evil influences don’t come only from people with whom we might associate. It almost seems that Satan and his

cohorts have taken over the world of entertainment. Think of the most-watched programs in Prime-Time. Most of them use homosexuality as their “stock in trade” source of comedy and treat it as though it is something perfectly “O.K.” Sex is no longer treated as a sacred relationship between married people. It is more often portrayed as a socially acceptable adult recreation between “consenting adults.” Women are commonly portrayed as sex objects, who are expected to “put out” if not on the first date, surely by the second or third. “Living together” before marriage is represented as the socially acceptable way to go. The “sense of the holy,” in general, is conspicuous by its absence. Take the sacred Name of God! One of the most common lines that scriptwriters give to the performers to express surprise is “Oh — my — God!” When God’s name is so blatantly used in vain, the sacred edge is dulled for us when we go to use it in prayer! All of us will want to use discretion when it comes to whom or what we allow to become an intimate part of our daily lives.

As Paul makes the application to the believer’s life, he uses several hypothetical questions to point to the inappropriateness of alliances between believers and unbelievers. What do they have in common: (“righteousness and wickedness,” “light and darkness,” “Christ and Belial,” (vv. 14–15)? In verse 16, Paul steps it up a notch to ask,

“What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?” His personal application is quick and precise. He reminds us that we need to keep in mind at all times that “we are the temple of the living God.” He adduces some passages of the Old Testament Scripture to support this truth and puts the stamp of God on it by adding “says the Lord Almighty” (vv. 17–18). It was God Himself giving fatherly advice. “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters.” We need to pick upon the remarkable truth being set forth here in this verse. God doesn’t say that He will be “like a father” to us. His promise is that He will be a true father to us and that His very nature will be passed on to us. He will give us His spiritual DNA, enabling us to develop God-like personality traits as we grow and mature spiritually.

Paul’s concluding word of advice is simple and to the point (7:1). In light of God’s promises to be with us, in this personal and intimate way, and out of reverence for God, “let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.” Note that in this directive, Paul includes himself. God lays on us the personal responsibility to be good caretakers of the new life He has given us. We are to avoid those things that are not consistent with our new nature as the very sons and daughters of God. Rather, we will actively expose ourselves to whatever will promote our lifelong venture of “perfecting holiness.”



To further promote healing in their relationship, Paul adds what we refer to today as “positive reinforcement.” He tells them that he has “great confidence” that they will continue in their loyalty to Jesus and to him. He says he is “greatly encouraged.”



PAUL’S FINAL PLEA FOR FULL ACCEPTANCE

2 CORINTHIANS 7:2–4

Paul now returns to the very personal matter which he had brought up earlier (6:13). Here he appeals to them again, “Make room for us in your hearts.” He reminds them that they can do this without any mental reservation, because “We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one” (7:2). Just to be sure that nobody will construe what he says as criticism and become “defensive” toward him, Paul reassures them that this is not his intention. He tells them of the place they have always had in his heart: “We would live or die with you.”

In some translations of the Bible (KJV & RSV), the words “die” and “live” are reversed giving a unique Christian twist. He is bound to them in Christian fellowship and love that would continue through death and last throughout eternal life!

To further promote healing in their relationship, Paul adds what we refer to today as “positive reinforcement.” He tells them that he has “great confidence” that they will continue in their loyalty to Jesus and to him. He says he is “greatly encouraged.” His spirit has been renewed and his enthusiasm for ministry restored because of them. Even though he had some painful moments, their return to him filled him with “joy that knows no bounds.” What a great “role model” he is for conscientious pastors. We see his patience, his love for God’s people, and the way he finds his greatest joy in the spiritual progress of his parishioners! He is a powerful inspiration to all of us to grow in our appreciation of those traits in the men of God sent to minister to us!

PERSONAL APPLICATION*2 CORINTHIANS 7:5–8:12*

Dear God, help me to put my “spiritual radar” to work as I study this lesson, searching for a personal message from You. Help me to hear what You want me to hear. Give me the resolve to follow any path of service You want me to take. Thank You for my life in Christ. Amen.

Review

1. Paul went to Troas after he sent Titus to Corinth with his “severe” letter (2 Cor. 2:12). Locate Troas on a Bible lands map. On what body of land was it situated?

2. What did Paul intend to do in Troas? (2:12) How does Paul describe the reception his message received in Troas and why did he leave?

2 Corinthians 7:5–7

3. Was this the first trip Paul ever made from Troas to Macedonia? (Acts 16:8–11) What moved Paul to go to Macedonia the first time?

Skim through Acts 16 and 17; find the names of three cities in Macedonia where Paul started churches (circle the two to which Paul wrote letters).

1.

2.

3.

4. Paul does not tell us here (7:5–7) in which city of Macedonia he stayed while waiting for Titus. How did things go with Paul while he was there?

5. What was it that finally brought Paul comfort and joy? (7:6–7)

What does he say about the depth of the joy their new attitude brought him?

2 Corinthians 7:8–16

6. What does Paul tell the Corinthians about the way he felt in his heart as he thought of sending a letter that he knew was going to “hurt” them?

What had Paul told them earlier in this letter? (2:2)

What explanation does Paul give for sending the letter even though he knew it would pain them and why was he now “happy” he had? (7:8–10)

7. In verses 7:11–12, Paul points to the remarkable personal changes that their “godly sorrow” had brought about. Paul pointed to this as evidence that they had truly experienced an “extreme makeover.” What added blessing would this bring about for them (7:12b)?
-

What effect did this have on Paul’s personal morale and who else was blessed (7:13–16)?

2 Corinthians 8:1–5

8. For what outstanding Christian “grace” on the part of the Macedonians did Paul speak words of praise (8:2)?
-

The people of the Macedonian churches had shown grace and supported what relief effort (8:4; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Romans 15:25–26)?

Evidently Paul had not planned to bring the appeal to the Macedonians. From verse 2, list the two terms Paul uses to describe their circumstances.

According to verses 8:3b–4, how was it that they became involved?

What does Paul say in verse 5 was the crucial dynamic behind their generosity?

2 Corinthians 8:6–12

9. When had the Corinthians first heard about the collection (8:6–10; 1 Corinthians 16:1)?
-

In verse 9, what important truth does he tell them to think about so that a willing heart and a generous spirit might be theirs?

Which word (v. 9a) describes what led Jesus to do what he did?

10. What does Paul say gave him an optimistic feeling about their response (8:7)?

To be acceptable, what attitude must accompany a gift (v. 12)?

11. What was helpful to you in this lesson?



2 CORINTHIANS

2 CORINTHIANS 7:5–8:12

PAUL'S EVALUATION OF THE EXPERIENCE	
2 CORINTHIANS 7:8–10	67
BLESSED RESULTS HIGHLIGHTED	
2 CORINTHIANS 7:11–12	67
THEIR RESPONSE BROUGHT JOY TO TITUS, TOO!	
2 CORINTHIANS 7:13–16	68
EMERGENCY PLANS TO HELP THE STARVING	
2 CORINTHIANS 8:1–5	69
ENCOURAGED TO GET INVOLVED – 2 CORINTHIANS 8:6–12	70
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 8:13–9:15	71

“It will please God only if it is done with a willing heart!”

.....

THE CORINTHIANS — A SOURCE OF JOY TO PAUL

In this section, Paul picks up where he left off when he began his rather lengthy digression or “parentheses” in chapter 2:14. You will recall that he cut his ministry short in Troas and took passage on a ship to Macedonia. He hoped to find Titus and get a report on how the Corinthians had responded to his disciplinary letter (2:12–13).

PAUL'S STATE OF MIND IN MACEDONIA

2 CORINTHIANS 7:5–7

Unfortunately for Paul, Titus hadn't gotten back to Macedonia, and so his anxiety continued. In fact, as he wrote this section, things actually became worse: “When we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn — conflicts on the outside, fears within” (v. 5). Paul doesn't say in what city of Macedonia his harassment took place. It could have been Philippi where Paul had previously experienced fierce opposition. Other possibilities would be Thessalonica or Berea. We can only guess what the specific “harassment” was. The “conflicts on the outside” could refer to his sharing in some of the persecution that the Christians of Macedonia experienced on a regular basis. He also had to deal with the contentious attitude of those with whom he discussed theology. The “fears within” could refer to Paul's concern that the enemies of the Gospel would convince the authorities to put a “gag order” on him, as they had tried to do on his first visit to this part of the world (see Acts

18:9). His “fears” very likely included his anxiety about the kind of reception that the people in Corinth had given to the letter he had asked Titus to hand-deliver to them.

As distressing as his experiences in Macedonia had been, they were no match for the good news that his colleague, Titus, soon brought him. Titus returned to Paul with his report that the people of Corinth had responded favorably to his letter of reproof. They had a change of heart which displayed itself in expressions of genuine repentance and surprisingly, even a strong affection for their former pastor.

This favorable turn of events, Paul says, brought him “comfort.” He felt a surge of inner strength, “so that my joy was greater than ever” (v. 7).

PAUL’S EVALUATION OF THE EXPERIENCE

2 CORINTHIANS 7:8–10

Paul now takes the discussion in a direction that some feel to be risky. He brings up the matter of the “painful” letter he had sent them. The wound had healed. Why open it again? Paul knew that where there has been conflict, healing cannot really be complete until both parties are able to think about it, and even speak about, without mental distress. What Titus had reported gave him the courage to bring this up. It shows that Paul had complete confidence in the sincerity of the Corinthians.

Paul used God-given tact and finesse, which he trusted would avoid stirring up old resentments. He diverted their attention from the mental and emotional anguish which they had experienced upon receiving Paul’s “severe letter.” He tells them about the anguish he experienced as he wrote the letter. He repeated, in essence, what he had written earlier: “For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many

tears” (2:4). They knew their former pastor. It was not his nature to take pleasure in making them feel bad. He even admits to them that there was a time when he actually “did regret” sending the letter (7:8). However, he explains to them that his love for them required him to do it (2:4b). The consolation he had was that it would be for “only for a little while” (literally: “for only an hour!”).

In verse 9, Paul describes the joy he felt because of the happy outcome of the mutually painful experience they had, “now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance.” The word that Paul uses here (*metanoia*) suggests a complete change of mind and heart — a 180 degree change of direction! Their sorrow and their regret for their disloyalty to Paul — and to God — had produced a completely new attitude. The apostle refers to their sorrow as the kind of sorrow, “that God intended” — the kind that led to a complete change of mind and heart on their part. Such a priceless outcome had made the pain, not only worthwhile, but exceedingly “cost effective!”

BLESSED RESULTS HIGHLIGHTED

2 CORINTHIANS 7:11–12

Here Paul refers to some of the spectacular blessings their “change of heart” had produced: “See what this godly sorrow has produced in you.” To express the remarkable nature of these new qualities on the part of the Corinthians, the King James translation begins each listing with “yea!” Our word “WOW!” comes close to expressing the feeling that Paul was trying to convey.

Paul’s first “WOW!” was: “what earnestness!” The word suggests fervent devotion to the truth. No longer would they allow themselves to be hoodwinked by smooth-talking false teachers. They would stick with Paul’s teachings! The second on Paul’s list was their “eagerness to clear yourselves!” Obviously, they cared deeply

• • • • •

Paul describes the joy he felt because of the happy outcome of the mutually painful experience they had, “now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance.”

• • • • •

about their relationship with Paul (Titus, too!). They could not wait to clear up anything that stood in the way of complete reconciliation between them and Paul. The third “WOW!” is closely related. Paul wanted them to know how impressed he was when Titus described their intense “indignation!” More than likely the “righteous indignation” was directed at themselves for being so gullible as to let these “peddlers” of uncertified religious ideas do their thinking for them.

Paul also remembered how Titus had mentioned “the alarm” that some parishioners in Corinth had spoken about. In this connection it was very likely the vivid realization of how close they had come to spiritual disaster! Evidently, they sighed a collective “Whew! That was close!” It was a “wake-up call” for them, and they were glad they had heard it. Paul proceeds to put the spotlight on another important “attitude change” he had observed: “What longing!” This could refer to the unabashed fervent desire on the part of all of them to return to “the way we were” in their relationship with God and God’s special “ambassador.” They hoped that Paul would be able to “forgive and forget!”

The final item Paul really appreciated was their “readiness to see justice done!” Apparently, there was absolutely no reluctance, no holding back, on their part to carry out, ASAP, every

single directive Paul had given them concerning the offending party (or parties). In summary, Paul makes the observation; “At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter” (v. 11b). As far as Paul was concerned, there was nothing standing in the way of complete and healthy reconciliation with these people whom he loved so dearly.

Verse twelve was a generous statement on the part of Paul to let them know how encouraged he was. Their wonderful response, as he had just described proved, without a doubt, that they understood and appreciated, the apostle’s loving purpose in writing the letter that caused them personal anguish “for a little while.” Their response brought him tremendous joy!

THEIR RESPONSE BROUGHT JOY TO TITUS, TOO!

2 CORINTHIANS 7:13–16

Sensitive to the fragile condition of a relationship in healing, Paul took advantage of everything that he could which might have therapeutic value. He goes on to remind them that their behavior not only brought him encouragement and profound joy, and he states: “we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you.” Paul relates how he had sought to alleviate Titus’ reluctance to take on the assignment to deliver the “painful”

letter. He tells them: “I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me.” It may have been with a little lightheartedness that he told them: “Just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well.” Remember it was one of the charges brought against Paul that you can never believe what he says! The people of Corinth “came through” for the apostle. Titus raved about the great reception he had received: “you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling.” Paul turns this into another occasion to give them “positive reinforcement” as he expresses his pleasure at knowing that he can have “complete” confidence in them (7:16). How quickly the shattered relationship was healing!

EMERGENCY PLANS TO HELP THE STARVING

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1–5

Evidently Paul’s confidence in them was so strong that he didn’t hesitate to toss them a rather significant challenge. He brought up the subject of his fund-raising effort to bring relief to the famine-stricken Christians of Judea. He was even okay with the idea of introducing the topic with a reference to the sparkling performance of the Macedonian churches just a few miles to the north. Paul knew that a challenge could have a beneficial effect as it called for a significant exercise of their newly restored faith.

A noteworthy example was when Paul held up the Macedonians in their generous support of this fund-raiser, he did not shine the spotlight on the people, nor even the amount that they came up with. He told them “we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches” (8:1). The focus was on God, who enabled them to do what they did. True, the picture that Paul portrays is rather remarkable! Here they were; people who were already living below the poverty level. Rome had impoverished the country by exacting from it most of its natural

resources, notably its timber and minerals. Today we would call it a “Third-World Country.” Their poverty was even worse because they were Christians and treated as second-class citizens. They were the poorest of the poor.

This may help to explain why Paul says he originally wasn’t even going to ask them to participate in the fund-raiser. Remarkably, it was: “Entirely on their own,” Paul says, that the Macedonians “urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints” (3b–4). Paul explains: It was “their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty that welled up in rich generosity.” Come again, Paul! Did we hear you correctly? How could their “extreme poverty” be a factor in producing a spirit of generosity? Because their relationship with the Almighty God was strong and healthy, they had learned to trust Him completely for their eternal well-being and also their earthly well-being. They had faith that God would care for them no matter what the economic conditions were. The “joy” they felt in this relationship with their Heavenly Father, and their trust that God would provide their basic needs. It cleared the way for a spirit of compassion and generosity to develop and express itself. Paul was thrilled to be able to praise the generosity of the Macedonians because he was, in effect, praising God who was at work in their lives.

What an inspiration these Macedonians are for us! What an example of a God-pleasing attitude! If our first reaction is that these people are simply “out of our league,” Paul asks us to listen to him as he describes the essential steps that accounted for this demonstration of dedication. It is not only what God had done in bestowing upon them a rich measure of His grace. Paul says the people of Macedonia were able to do this because “they gave themselves first to the Lord” (8:5). This suggests a specific transaction; a time when they had declared that they were no longer in charge of their lives, and that they had “signed-off” to God the “pink slip”

of their being. When that takes place in sincerity, a person has a totally radical view of life. Everything we are and have belongs to God, but God gives us the honor and privilege to manage everything in a responsible way, as He directs.

Paul makes the observation that the Macedonians looked to him as God's spokesperson on earth. This is what he meant when he said that they had first given themselves to God, "and then to us in keeping with God's will." For us, too, it takes total surrender, first to God, and then to Paul and other "holy men of God who spoke [as they were] moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21, NKJV).

ENCOURAGED TO GET INVOLVED

2 CORINTHIANS 8:6–12

Paul's comment about the remarkable response of their fellow Christians to the north was his way of leading into the topic of their personal participation in the relief effort. Late in the previous year, Paul had sent Titus to Corinth to co-ordinate the plan (v. 6). Evidently, this project had become one of the casualties of the rift between Paul and the Corinthians. Now that everything was okay, once again, Paul felt it was time to go back and pick up where they had left off. He ties it in with what he had said about the Macedonians; he sees the role of Titus as helping them "bring also to completion this act of grace on your part" (v. 6). Once again he expresses complete confidence that they would be "up" for the challenge. As they excelled in other Christian virtues, he wrote, "See that you also excel in this grace of giving" (v. 7).

Paul must have sensed the possibility that these last words might have come across as an order. "I am not commanding you." He did not want them to think of it as an obligation — that would diminish their personal joy. For what it might be worth to them, he doesn't hesitate to add

(v. 8) that he really hoped they would take the challenge and give it their best effort. It would mean a lot to him and be good for them. He said it would be a "test" of their faith, an opportunity for them to demonstrate their sincerity. He would be proud (like a parent) to put them right up there with the Macedonians as outstanding examples of the handiwork of God.

Paul now reminds them not to forget that they had a source of motivation that was more important than just pleasing him. It was the unbelievable love which Jesus had already shown them: "That, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty, might become rich" (v. 9). Jesus willingly left His Father's home in heaven, sacrificing everything, including his very life on Calvary's Cross, to meet their basic and eternal needs, ensuring them of a place with God in heaven. What an example! What an inspiration for us! As we put our name in Paul's formula and give thought to the unbelievable depth of Jesus' love for us, how else can we respond, but look for ways that we can express our love to Him in obedience to his urging to love our neighbor as He has loved us.

As part of his encouragement for them to get involved in this relief effort, Paul reminds them (v. 10) that when Titus came with the appeal a year ago, they "were the first not only to give, but also to have the desire to do so." With the same attitude of eager willingness, Paul says, "pick up where you left off, and get the job done!" More important to God than our actual accomplishments, Paul says (v. 12), is the attitude of eager willingness. It is a yardstick by which we can measure every Christian act of kindness. It will please God only if it is done with a willing heart! Think about it!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 8:13–9:15

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for giving me the capacity to communicate through speech. Forgive the wrongs of my tongue, and with the aid of Your Holy Spirit help me to use words that bring honor to You and blessings to those around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Review:

1. Which group of Christians did the apostle hold up as a model for the Corinthians to emulate concerning the collection for the needy "saints" in Judea? (See 8:1–5)

Please list the qualities that impressed Paul.

1.

3.

 2.

 4.

Which characteristic impresses you the most? Why?

-
2. "Comparisons are odious" is a widely accepted maxim. What is different about the way Paul held up the example of the Macedonians' generosity? To what and to whom did he give the credit?

-
3. Whom did Paul hold up as the most persuasive example of the "Grace of Giving" (8:9)?

2 Corinthians 8:13–15

4. To which phenomenon in the Old Testament did Paul refer, to show that his appeal was in line with God's way of doing things?

What was so remarkable about God's plan then?

How did it apply to the Corinthians?

What does it mean for us today?

What does Ecclesiastes 11:1 urge us to do?

2 Corinthians 8:16–24

5. Whom was Paul sending to the Corinthians to “coach” them concerning their response to Paul’s appeal for funds?
-

How does Paul explain his choice of Titus as the leader of this delegation (vv. 16–17, 23)?

Who selected the two “nameless” members of the team (vv. 19, 23b)?

In addition to their “coaching” assignment, what other important role would they have? (8:19–20.)

Why was this important to Paul (v. 21)? (See also 2:17, 11:7–11, 12:14–18; 1 Thessalonians 2:3–12)

What can we learn from Paul’s great concern — not only to do what is right, but to avoid even the appearance of wrongdoing (v. 21)?

Can you think of an example from daily life?

2 Corinthians 9:1–5

6. For what does Paul give the Corinthians credit (9:1–2)?
-

Do you think that this is a role that we should try to cultivate? (See Hebrews 10:24)

Paul “left no stone unturned” in his effort to assist the Corinthians to respond wholeheartedly to his appeal and in the process enjoy a great spiritual experience (9:3–5). Do you see “learning” here for people who have a God-given responsibility for the spiritual well-being of others — e.g., pastors, parents, and teachers?

2 Corinthians 9:6–15

7. What truism from the world of agriculture does Paul mention to encourage a generous outpouring of funds?

Do you think this is still true?

Do you know from personal experience that it's still true?

Would you like to share with the class?

What other attitudes does God look for (9:7)?

When you give generously and in the right spirit, what does Paul say you can count on, according to verses 8-10?

In addition to critical physical needs being met, what precious spiritual blessings take place (v. 12) in the lives of those who are recipients of the donations?

What other satisfaction should be an incentive for being as generous as you can (vv. 13–14)?

Ultimately, who is the source of all this good “stuff” as far as Paul is concerned (v.15)?



2 CORINTHIANS

2 CORINTHIANS 8:13–9:15

PAUL SENDS A STRONG SUPPORT TEAM	
2 CORINTHIANS 8:16–21	75
THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD FOLLOW-THROUGH	
2 CORINTHIANS 9:1–5	76
A COMPELLING REASON TO BE GENEROUS	
2 CORINTHIANS 9:6–11	77
MORE GOOD REASON TO FOLLOW PAUL'S ADVICE	
2 CORINTHIANS 9:12–15	78
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 10:1–11:15	80

“Paul’s example clearly teaches us that it is important for us to always do what is right. And we need to exercise great caution to make sure that we do not give others the impression that we might be involved in improper behavior.”

.....

MORE ABOUT PAUL’S APPEAL FOR FUNDS

Earlier in this chapter, Paul had “showcased” what he considered the most compelling and most persuasive source of inspiration for his dear friends in Corinth. He held up the example of Jesus: “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (8:9).

GOD’S WAY OF TAKING CARE OF HIS PEOPLE

2 CORINTHIANS 8:13–15

In this section, Paul was apparently trying to anticipate and deal with possible objections, which some might raise concerning any aspect of his appeal. First of all, in verse 13, he makes the disclaimer that the Lord did not expect them to impoverish themselves in order to assist the people who were experiencing a famine. Paul makes it plain that he wasn’t asking them to give income that they needed to put food on the table for their families and pay other bills for the necessities of life. The source of their donations was to be what we today refer to as “discretionary” income.

We get the impression from 1 Corinthians 1:26 that the members of the Corinthian congregation were mainly of the middle and lower classes of society in their city. Paul must have known them well enough, however, to be able to say that, in spite of their lower social status, most of them did have some “discretionary” income. In verse 14, he

refers to them as having “plenty.” He reminds them that if the time ever comes that they find themselves in dire straits; they will be rescued when others in the fellowship of faith dip into their “plenty” to provide for them. This is how God would like to see things work in His earthly family.

To support his recommendation of this plan, Paul reminds them that this is how it happened with God’s Old Testament family while they sojourned in the desert (8:15). Remember the orders God had given concerning the gathering of the manna, which he provided (Exodus 16:18). Those who were able to gather abundance shared with the feeble who didn’t have the energy to gather even the bare minimum. The result was: “He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little!” God’s plan is still in effect for our generation as well. The needy, especially those who are part of the body of Christ, have a rightful claim to some of the “plenty” that God has given us.

PAUL SENDS A STRONG SUPPORT TEAM

2 CORINTHIANS 8:16–21

Paul tells them that he is sending them a team of men to help them support and organize the fund-raising effort. Titus would be the facilitator for the team. In verse 6 of this chapter, Paul mentions that Titus was a logical choice for this role “since he had earlier made a beginning.” He would work with them “to bring to completion this act of grace on your part.” Most of the people in Corinth had gotten to know Titus quite well. Remember, he had been the apostle’s personal emissary to deliver his disciplinary letter. He had also stayed on with them to help them work through the changes that needed to take place. He had the exciting privilege of experiencing the complete attitude “makeover” on the part of the Corinthians. Furthermore, Paul says, this was something Titus really wanted to do. He jumped at the chance to return to Corinth and work with them because he had grown to love these people. Paul wrote: “He not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his initiative” (8:17). The Greek word Paul uses here for “initiative” is the same word he used to describe the attitude of the Macedonians who pleaded with Paul to let them participate in the fund-raiser (8:4).

In keeping with his word when he introduced the plan (1 Corinthians 16:3–4), Paul told them that as part of the support, he was sending a couple of men whom they knew. These men would also be responsible for getting the donated funds to the church in Jerusalem (8:17–18). First, he mentions that he is sending along with Titus “the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the Gospel” (v. 18). Some interpreters think it might have been Dr. Luke, or possibly even Barnabas, both of whom had accompanied Paul on many trips. In verse 22, Paul writes: “In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous.” Paul doesn’t mention the name of this “brother” either because he was well-known to the people in Corinth.

Paul reminds them that these well-known churchmen were chosen by the churches of the area to be their personal “reps” with regard to the logistics of gathering, accounting, and delivering the funds that were gathered. Paul lets them know how he felt about this venture. For him, it was a sacred endeavor, which “we administer in order to honor the Lord himself, and to show our eagerness to help” (8:19). As far as he was concerned, it was one big act of worship in which all of them participated to express their love for the Father. They demonstrated their God-inspired love for brothers and sisters in the faith who had fallen on hard times. He didn’t want anything to tarnish it.

In verses 20 and 21, he explains that the appointment of these special “men of God” was to have another function to ensure the integrity of the operation from beginning to end. It was important to safeguard the venture from any negative criticism against the apostle himself. Remember that one of the most distressing of the false charges brought against Paul was that he was in the business of evangelism for the sake of “making a fast buck.” Paul explains that “we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men” (v. 21). Apparently, it proved to be a prudent move on Paul’s part. There is no record of any criticism against Paul in connection with this fund-raiser.

In our age, with its carry-over of the so-called “spirit of the nineties,” we seem to have lost this sensitivity. So many people, including professing Christians, reflect this “I’ll do what I please” attitude. Paul’s example clearly teaches us that it is important for us to always do what is right. And we need to exercise great caution to make sure that we do not give others the impression that we might be involved in improper behavior. In his list of things he wanted the Thessalonians to keep in mind, Paul wrote, “Abstain from all appearance of evil!” (1 Thessalonians 5:22, KJV). In his

biography, Billy Graham tells how he put this principle into practice. He made it a rule never to be seen in public alone with an adult member of the opposite sex, as innocent as the relationship might be. He was extremely careful not to give anyone an occasion to spread rumors that would impugn his character and bring dishonor upon the Name of God.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD FOLLOW-THROUGH

2 CORINTHIANS 9:1–5

As we pause to reflect on the previous verses, one thing that stands out is the great attention to detail that Paul gave to this venture. While it did involve money, that’s not what the effort was about. Paul gave it his best shot because he saw it as a splendid demonstration in honor of God, which would also result in rich blessing to all — both on the giving and the receiving end. His big heart and his marvelous brain were united to make it a shining success! His enthusiasm was contagious and inspirational. His program would lay down the tracks on which their positive response could ride. With his enthusiasm and organizational skills, Paul certainly is a great role model for those who have responsibility for the spiritual development of others.

In the opening verses of Chapter 9, Paul tells his friends in Corinth that he had another reason for wanting desperately to have them participate in this fund-raiser. It would be for their spiritual blessing as well! Paul sounds almost apologetic as he gives this directive to them. The NEB translation of verse 1 reads, “It is almost superfluous for me to write to you.” Paul goes on to tell them that he had good reason to feel this way about them. In 8:10, he reminds them that they had been the first to support the fund-raising plan and the first to open their hands with monetary gifts. In fact, Paul tells them (9:2) that he had bragged to their neighbors to the north about the tremendous support the people

of Corinth and others in the province had shown for this fund-raiser. He made the observation that it was really their enthusiasm that had “stirred most of them [the Macedonians] to action.”

Without question, the apostle was anxious to have the Gentile Christians come through with a generous amount of money. He also knew that all of the good intentions, without follow-through, couldn’t buy a stick of bread for the hungry. His goal was to help his people follow through on their good intentions, knowing that deep in their hearts this is what they have wanted to do. Equally important for Paul was his concern that the giving would be a positive spiritual experience. That’s where the “brothers” came in. They would be on hand to answer questions, get them to think about their role in the relief effort, and to set up the mechanics to receive the offerings. With the help of the men of God who came to them, they could now make up for lost time and come up with “a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given” (9:5). Their good follow-through would eliminate the risk of possible embarrassment to Paul and to them if some Macedonians accompanied Paul on his way to take the donations to Jerusalem (9:3–5).

A COMPELLING REASON TO BE GENEROUS

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6–11

Here (v. 6), Paul pulls out a popular maxim from the world of agriculture to make an important point concerning his “pitch” for a generous offering on the part of the Corinthians. Every farmer knew that if he expected to have any harvest at all, he needed to put some seed into the ground. Common sense told him that if he put seed into the ground sparingly, there wouldn’t be much for him to harvest. The converse is true: If you expect to have an abundant harvest, you will need to put a lot of seed into the ground. It’s a “no-brainer.” If you apply this to the appeal for funds, our first thought might be that Paul is thinking first and foremost about reaping a big harvest of cash to buy food for the men, women, and children of the Jerusalem Church. Certainly, that was a legitimate consideration.

Yet, it seems from what follows (vv. 8–11) that Paul was thinking more about a very special harvest in the lives of the Corinthians. He explains in verse 5, that one of the reasons for sending the support group to them, is that he did not want them to come up with a last-minute “piddly” gift which they gave “grudgingly.” Rather, he said, he was hoping for a “generous gift.” Here he elaborates on this thought. “Each man should

give what he in his heart has decided to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion” (v. 7). As he just said, when people haven’t taken the time to think about it and pray about it, the gift will very likely be rather skimpy. That would be bad for the cause. It would be of very little spiritual benefit to the donor, if any. But even more important, it wouldn’t be pleasing to God. You see, God looks beyond the gift to check the attitude of the giver and the spirit in which the gift was given. Paul reminds them, “For God loves a cheerful giver!” (9:7).

There may be special significance in the fact that of the three words for love that Paul might have used, he chose the word “agapao.” This particular word is generally used to describe divine love shared in the Gospel. Perhaps Paul simply wanted to highlight what a great and wonderful thing any expression of divine love is. To get “kudos” from the Lord of heaven and earth would be like a first-time Olympian getting gold for a perfect performance. Incidentally, the word translated “cheerful” is “hilaron,” from which we get our word “hilarious.” God loves us when we give in a spirit of hilarity; really have a “fun” time, as the younger generation would put it. Maybe you have heard the slogan: Give until it hurts! In light of this recommendation from Paul, a more appropriate slogan would be: Give until it feels good! Paul’s advice is to the Corinthians, and to us, as we consider how much of our time, talent, and treasure we will return to the Lord.

Paul still isn’t finished with his list of the personal dividends, which accrue for those who give generously. Here is something else that they can expect. “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (9:8). Note the word “all” used four times in this verse and the verb “abound”

twice. As they responded generously to God’s appeal for funds through Paul, God was going to respond with unbelievable grace to them. They could count on God to take good care of them in every way. All their earthly and physical needs will be covered and they will have more than they need so that they will be in a position to donate to many causes. They will become the kind benefactor who was extolled in Psalm 112:9.

Once again, Paul returns to the imagery of seeds and harvest (9:10). Remember that it is the same all-powerful God who gives the seed to the farmer and the bread that is made from the harvested wheat that we are dealing with here. This same God stands ready to give you a special kind of seed, which has the capacity to produce a “bumper crop” of righteous deeds. In plain language (9:11), Paul repeats the thought, and tells them if they heed his words about being generous and cheerful in their giving to this special God-inspired cause, God will bless them so abundantly that they could “be generous on every occasion” (9:11). This is not some “cutesy” idea, which Paul came up with to promote a good response to his appeal. It is all quite biblical and reminiscent of the words of Jesus when He taught, “Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38).

MORE GOOD REASON TO FOLLOW PAUL’S ADVICE

2 CORINTHIANS 9:12–15

In the closing verses of this chapter, Paul highlights some very exciting things to which generous donors can look forward. In addition to the very practical accomplishment of relieving the hunger pangs of the Judean Christians,

Paul singles out some intangible, but very real and significant items. One of the fruits that they can look forward to “harvesting” is the knowledge that their humble efforts have produced a “bumper crop” of “expressions of thanks to God” (v. 12). The thanksgivings, obviously, would be forthcoming from those who now had food on the table. Verse 13 takes the thought to a higher level. There are going to be those who will look at your outstanding performance and make the observation that it shows evidence that your profession of faith is not just a matter of pious words. They would be enthusiastic about proclaiming that you not only “talked the talk,” but you also “walked the walk!” We can’t over-estimate the importance of this in our life today. People are watching Christians. If they fail to see evidence of a correlation between their “talk” and their “walk,” Satan will use that to lead them to the conclusion that their faith is phony. On the other hand, if there is congruity between faith and life, they will receive a good impression and be more open to the Spirit’s working. Just think, Paul writes, “men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ, and for your generosity.”

For Paul, at this time, all of this was extremely important. As the apostle to the Gentiles, he was aware of the deep division which existed between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. Just the thought of some healing of the breach was quite an exciting prospect for the apostle.

Another thing that they could count on “because of the surpassing grace God has given you,” Paul says, is that “in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you.” For Paul, the thought of having thousands of people praying on your behalf was a breathtaking concept.

In the last verse (15), Paul just has to praise something else that always takes his breath away, every time he thinks about it. “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” Linguists point out that this word that Paul uses to express his conviction about the “hugeness” of God’s gift, is not found anywhere in classical Greek. Most believe that Paul “coined” the word himself. It was one time when he was saying that, “The Greeks have a word for it!” didn’t apply. So, Paul made up his own word to express how he felt about the gift he had referred to (9:15). Ultimately, it was God’s gift of a Savior which generated all the good things that Paul had been referring to, and the result of His grace in the lives of those who believe in Him!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1–11:15

Heavenly Father, as I read about the stupid mistakes that the people of Corinth made, help me to see how vulnerable I am to doing the same thing. Help me to learn from their example that the same forces of evil are at work in the world today, relentlessly seeking to undermine my faith and to mislead me from the Truth. Give me a rich measure of Your Holy Spirit, so that I will be able to discern false ideas and decisively refuse to give them any place in my mind, so that I may remain faithful to You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Review:

1. Choose what you consider the best phrase to complete the following sentence: Paul's primary concern in promoting the fundraising for the famine-stricken people in Judea was:

- ☐ to relieve the physical and mental anguish of starving fellow-believers.
- ☐ to have the Corinthians experience the blessings that come from being generous and caring.
- ☐ to have people thank and praise God.
- ☐ all of the above.

List passages from Chapter 9 which support your answer:

2. Complete this sentence: According to chapter nine, verses 10–11, one of the great blessings that I can count on from God is that

2 Corinthians 10:1–11

3. According to verse 1a, what criticism from his detractors does Paul deal with in this section? How does he prove the detractors wrong as he begins this letter? (v. 1)

What does he say about the charge that he was always "timid" when in their midst? (vv. 2, 6, and 11)

4. How does Paul describe the difference between the methods of his detractors and the methods that he uses (v. 4)?

Are his weapons defensive or offensive weapons?

What are they able to do, according to verse 5?

What does this mean for you as you think about being a witness to the Gospel in your daily life?

What other criticism were his enemies circulating against Paul (vv. 7–8)?

How does Paul answer this charge?

2 Corinthians 10:12–18

5. What does Paul have to say in verse 12 about the teachers who claimed to be “super- apostles”?

What is his conclusion about the practice of evaluating their own performance? (Look at other translations for Paul’s thought here.)

What does he imply about the people who were duped by those who came to them trying to impress them with all kinds of high-sounding but meaningless credentials?

-
6. To support their claim that they were quite effective, the false teachers pointed to the great following they had in Corinth. What is Paul’s evaluation of such boasting (v. 15)?

How did this differ from the policy and practice of Paul (vv. 13–16)?

-
7. When it comes to an evaluation of a person’s effectiveness in ministry, what does Paul say is the “bottom line,” (vv. 16–17)? (Whose approval should a servant of God seek?)

-
8. What hope did Paul express concerning the congregation in Corinth, according to vv. 15–16? (See also Romans 15:24–28)
-

2 Corinthians 11:1–15

9. What analogy from the Jewish culture of his day does Paul use (11:1–2) to describe his deep concern for the spiritual well-being of his dear people?

In what way was the deception they had experienced like the deception that Eve succumbed to in the Garden of Eden (vv. 2–3)? Why was this disastrous (v. 3)?

In what way did Paul say he was “superior” to the “super-apostles” (v. 6)?

-
10. What else did his detractors not like about Paul’s policy and practice when he came to Corinth (vv. 7–12)?

Who supported him during his ministry in Corinth?

Why do you think Paul’s practice of not taking any money from the Corinthians bothered the false teachers?

What was Paul’s judgment about these teachers (vv. 13–14)?

-
11. What was helpful to you in this lesson?
-

PAUL'S CRITIQUE OF THE FALSE TEACHERS	
2 CORINTHIANS 10:12–18	85
PAUL'S DEEP CONCERN FOR HIS PEOPLE	
2 CORINTHIANS 11:1–15	86
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 11:16–12:13	88

“As it was for Paul, so it will be for everyone who responds favorably to the superior knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, as taught and proclaimed by Paul. ‘We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ’ (v. 5). Whatever our mind comes up with, or whatever comes in from the outside, we will allow it space in our minds only if it is compatible with the Lordship of Christ Jesus, our Lord, and Savior.”

• • • • •

PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS MINISTRY REVISITED

It is quite apparent, even to the casual reader, that chapter 10 reflects an abrupt change of mood and style on the part of the apostle Paul. Up to this point, Paul had written in a “kinder, gentler” fashion to the faithful in Corinth. He gave unrestrained expression of his deep affection for them, all of which had intensified since he had come so close to losing them to the false teachers. Apparently the apostle, guided by the Holy Spirit, felt that it would be helpful for these same beloved people if he would now take care of some “unfinished business.” The nature of the “unfinished business” required a change of mood and style on the part of Paul. In this section, he put the spotlight on some of the “bad-mouthing” that was still being circulated in Corinth by his detractors.

ABOUT THE CHARGE THAT HE WAS “CHICKEN”

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1–11

One of the criticisms his antagonists liked to indulge in was the charge that he had the courage of a chicken. They said that Paul had used some pretty strong language in his letters, but when he was there in person, he was the proverbial timid “Mr. Milquetoast” (v. 10). With self-deprecating humor, Paul starts this portion of the letter not with boldness, but in the spirit of a humble suppliant. “By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you” (v. 1). Paul uses an approach that is exactly the opposite of what his detractors had said was his usual style in letters. In verse two, he adds the thought that he hoped he wouldn’t have to show them how

forceful and bold he could be when he was face-to-face with them.

Paul attributes the antagonism of his detractors to a total misunderstanding of the basis of Paul's ministry. He classifies them as "people who think that we live by the standards of this world" (v. 2). He goes on to say, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does" (v. 3). Here, Paul compares his ministry to a military campaign that is on the offensive to destroy the entrenched forces of evil and reclaim the world for God; something we pray for regularly in the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer, when we say "Thy Kingdom come!"

Paul explained that, since this "kingdom" is not of this world, its weapons, likewise, "are not of this world." It is reminiscent of what Jesus said to Pilate (John 18:37). The false teachers came to Corinth, flaunting their impressive Jewish pedigree like badges of authority intended to impress and intimidate the people. From comments that they made elsewhere, it appears that they put a great deal of confidence in their oratorical skills and psychological gimmickry. Many of the "neophyte converts" were "taken in" by the smooth-talking interlopers; to the point that they were persuaded to abandon the instruction they had received from Paul. The "learning" in all this is quite clear for us. It should be a "wake-up call" for church leaders who care about being true to their calling, as well as for those who are searching for a church home. Be cautious and discriminating!

In verse 4, Paul declares: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." The "strongholds" in this spiritual warfare are spelled out in verse 5. "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." Only the truth from God has the power

to penetrate the heart and deliver people from the misleading fallacies of human thought and wisdom. Only the Gospel of God can bring about a change of heart that leads to a genuine surrender to God. As it was for Paul, so it will be for everyone who responds favorably to the superior knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, as taught and proclaimed by Paul. "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (v. 5). Whatever our mind comes up with, or whatever comes in from the outside, we will allow it space in our minds only if it is compatible with the Lordship of Christ Jesus, our Lord, and Savior.

In the final verse of this section (v. 6), Paul picks up on the statement he made in verse two. He refers to the fact that he probably would have to be "bold" and deal harshly with some people in Corinth. "We will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete." Once Paul was confident that his people had "separated" themselves from the teachers who had usurped his authority, he assures them that he will go into action "to punish every act of disobedience" on the part of the false teachers. Paul would be "in their face," not timidly, but with bold pronouncements of judgment against these scoundrels. At the end of the section, he says it again: "What we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present" (v. 11). They could count on it! And it wouldn't be pretty to watch.

Apparently, at least one teacher set himself up against the apostle Paul. He claimed to have a special relationship with Christ, and disparaged Paul as someone who had joined the ranks of the followers of Christ in a roundabout way (1 Corinthians 15:8–9). Take a good look at the claim, he tells them, and you will discover that it has no merit. "We belong to Christ just as much as he" (v. 7). Paul here alludes to the very special way in which he had been

converted on the Damascus Road and had been commissioned by Jesus Himself to be His apostle to the Gentiles. Paul says (v. 8) that this was something he would never “be ashamed of,” not because he was so great, but because it was such a dramatic example of the mercy and grace of God. He admits that he boasted “somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us.” He explains that it really gave him pleasure, because it had been given to him for their benefit. It was not an “end unto itself.” Paul said God gave him this authority, “for building you up rather than pulling you down.”

Paul humbly apologizes to them about the “weighty and forceful” letters, for which his critics were citing him. “I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters” (v. 9). He knew that his antagonists were putting him down and saying: “In person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing” (v. 10). And they weren’t the only ones. Another writing from that period describes Paul as “a man of small stature, with a bald head, and crooked legs...with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.” So, maybe his detractors had some basis for the charge that concerning his physical appearance, he wasn’t too impressive!

Paul had told them “right up front” that they shouldn’t expect him to sound like the popular orators of their culture. “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). However, that he was a “wash out” as a public speaker simply was not true. Unlike the false teachers, he knew what he was talking about. The power in his speaking was the plain and simple Truth, which he had received from Christ Himself, and that was powerful! Just think of all the converts who responded to his Gospel preaching!

PAUL’S CRITIQUE OF THE FALSE TEACHERS

2 CORINTHIANS 10:12–18

Here, Paul takes on the claim of the false teachers that they were far superior to him and that they had more to offer. Evidently, there were still some among the members of the church in Corinth who were quite impressed by these false teachers. Paul uses the literary device of satire in his effort to get his friends in Corinth to see how gullible they had been in accepting at face value all of the credentials these smooth-talking interlopers were flashing before them. With satire, peppered with a sprinkle of sarcasm, Paul tells them that he wouldn’t think of comparing himself with these people who obviously rated themselves so highly (v. 12). He was confident that his friends in Corinth would see where he was going with this, and would be led to “see through” these claims and evaluate them as invalid. So, he doesn’t hesitate to say that when they “measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise” (literally, “foolish”). Paul hoped that his friends in Corinth would readily agree with his critique and in their minds pass judgment on the whole idea with the verdict: “How stupid of them! And how stupid of us to be so gullible.”

In the remaining verses of this chapter, Paul takes another “swipe” at these teachers who claimed to be superior to him. He criticizes them, and their validity of the claim, that they were so much better than he. When he boasts about his ministry in Corinth and the effectiveness of his Gospel ministry in their midst, this has legitimacy because he had received a directive from God Himself to come to them. God had given him the assignment (Galatians 2:7–9). He had accepted the assignment and had given it his “best shot” (v. 13). The impostors had come on their own and were “taking credit” for whatever following they were able to swing their way. He leveled this charge of unethical behavior, first

for imposing themselves and their false Judaistic teaching upon these people whom Paul had recruited for the Christian faith. Paul had been the first to come to them “with the Gospel of Christ” (v. 14). He boldly stated that it was highly unethical of them to take credit and personal satisfaction for the following that had been stolen from Paul (v. 15). At this point, Paul was considering the boasting of the false teachers purely from a human point of view. He wanted the Corinthians to see for themselves, even at a human level, how “bogus” these men were.

Along the same line, Paul inserts here a thought which further reinforces his commitment to the principle which he had just enunciated. As the “Apostle to the Gentiles,” he lets them know that he looked forward to the day when they would become a well-established congregation under capable pastoral leadership. He told them that he hoped to make Corinth the base from which he could reach out “in the regions beyond you” (v. 16). In Romans 15:24, Paul refers to his plan to eventually get as far as Spain with the Gospel. This was his deep passion, and he was good at it. He doesn’t mind telling them that it gave him great satisfaction to bring the life-saving Gospel to people who hadn’t heard it before.

Paul winds up this section by saying, in effect, “Let’s get off this topic of boasting.” He was very uncomfortable playing such a role. “But, let him who boasts boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.” He hoped that this would suffice to get them to really see through the preposterous claims of those self-appointed “super-apostles.”

PAUL’S DEEP CONCERN FOR HIS PEOPLE

2 CORINTHIANS 11:1–1.5

Having said what he did about “no more boasting,” Paul now takes a different tack in his

discussion about the untrustworthiness of his antagonists in Corinth. He begins with another veiled apology for continuing in this vein of thought. He wanted them to think about this situation and see it from Paul’s viewpoint. Maybe that would help them to understand a little better why he was so concerned. He said that he was “jealous” for them “with a godly jealousy” (v. 2). The “godly jealousy” might be an allusion to the Words of God in Exodus 20:5, and in other places in the Old Testament, where God expressed His deep and abiding love for His people. God loves His people so much that He simply cannot tolerate the thought of them giving their heart to anyone else. It is not a sick or selfish jealousy, but an emotion that springs from his knowledge of what this will mean for those who turn their backs on Him.

Paul uses the analogy of something that was common in the culture of that day. He was like the traditional “matchmaker” who had been engaged by a father to handle all of the details of a betrothal on behalf of a son. One of the implications of the assignment for the agent was that he would guarantee the “virginity” of the bride-to-be. Paul hopes to engage the minds of the young converts to think of him as the agent of God the Father, through whom they had been “betrothed” to His Son, Jesus Christ. “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him” (v. 2). Their infidelity was not toward Paul, but to the Lord Jesus. Still, he would feel like a failure. Maybe they could begin to see why Paul was so emotionally involved in this venture.

As he focuses on what happened, he gently zeroes in on their gullibility. He refers to what happened, not as something they had deliberately done; but rather it was that they had allowed themselves to be seduced into misbelief. He points to the example of “Eve [who was] deceived by the serpent’s cunning” (v. 3). He continues by

saying that somehow their “minds” had been “led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Their mistake, like Eve’s, was that they gave an opening to the impostors and “listened” to them without evaluating and comparing what these people taught with what Paul had taught. There really was no excuse for doing that.

Another thing to consider, in this connection, that should make Paul’s message more authentic and plausible, Paul says, was that he had nothing personal to gain from his preaching. Paul had leaned over backward, to make it as clear as possible, that he had no other motive for preaching the Gospel to the Corinthians than his deep love for them; people who needed to hear the Good News of God’s forgiveness and love. So he preached the Gospel of God to them “free of charge,” he says in verse 7. He explains that the Macedonians had come through to underwrite the mission work in Corinth and the surrounding area, “I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so” (v. 9).

Paul spent some time here trying to clear this up because his enemies made it a point of contention that he hadn’t accepted any remuneration for his services. His enemies said derogatory things about this practice. It wasn’t “politically correct,” they said. As far as they were concerned, this should be enough for them to seriously question the integrity of Paul. That’s why Paul begins this section with the question, “Was it a sin for me to lower myself” in this way? The “spin” that his opponents put on the policy that Paul had established while working in the area of Corinth, was that it showed Paul really didn’t love these people since he wouldn’t take their dollars.

Paul asks the rhetorical question about “why” he did it. Was it “Because I do not love you?” The answer: “God knows I do!” (v. 11). He explained that the criticism of the opposition would not get him to change this practice; it was to Paul’s

advantage to keep on doing business this way. It would keep the interlopers from putting themselves at the same level as the apostle because getting money for what they did was what it was all about for them. “I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want the opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about” (v. 12). The false prophets wished he would change his policy so that at least at this level he would be on the same footing as they were. There is the implication that these impostors, not only accepted money, they demanded it from their followers. In modern language, this greed “tipped their hand” and should have made it quite plain to everyone involved that their motive was not their love for the people, but strictly materialistic.

In the closing verses of this section (11:13–15), Paul “takes off the gloves” and declares in no uncertain terms his judgment against these men. He calls them “false prophets, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ” and (the ultimate condemnation), servants of Satan himself. Paul exposes the false apostles for what they really are, judging by what they were trying to do — destroying the faith in Christ which alone can save. They disguised themselves as servants of righteousness, but were in reality out to destroy God’s work. This should not come as a surprise. Satan’s attacks are seldom overt and frontal attacks. Satan himself paraded as a servant of “light” or representative of God Himself. They are often carried out by those within the church who misguidedly “play right into the hands of God’s enemy.” Paul’s job was to expose them; God would take care of their destiny. They will get what they deserve when they stand before Him one day. With this, Paul rests his case against the false teachers.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 11:16–12:13

Lord of the Church, please open my mind and my heart to the many messages which You want to communicate through this portion of Scripture. Give me a new appreciation of the personal price that Paul and others paid, to make sure that the Gospel came through loud and clear. Help me to truly cherish the truth and to take a firm stand, resisting the tide of public opinion, which cannot tolerate the idea of “absolute truth.”
In the Name of Him who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” Amen.

Review

1. Please re-read the first half of Chapter Eleven. How do you think Paul's harsh denunciation of the “bogus” teachers would come across to people of our generation who support the notion that “religious tolerance” is one of the greatest of virtues?

How do you feel about Paul's intolerance of certain religious ideas?

According to 11:3–4, why was it crucial for him to warn his people in Corinth about the false teachers and the false teachings?

Was Jesus “tolerant” of other religions? (See John 14:6)

How can we be tolerant of other people and still be true to Jesus?

2 Corinthians 11:16–21a

2. What does Paul call people who boast about themselves (11:16)?

What excuse does Paul give for engaging in this questionable practice (11:18)?

3. What “disclaimer” does he also make in verse 17?

Do you think this means that this section of his letter is of lesser quality than the rest of the letter? (2 Timothy 3:16)

4. In verse 20, Paul tells them why he thinks the people will go along with his unorthodox “boasting,” and he also gives us some insight regarding the “leadership style” of the false teachers. How did these impostors treat Paul’s good friends in Corinth?

What does it show about their understanding of the Gospel?

2 Corinthians 11:21b–29

5. When the renegade teachers first came, they tried to impress the members of the Corinthian congregation by introducing themselves as people who had the correct “bloodline.” For the sake of his friends in Corinth, Paul makes the point that they “didn’t have anything on him.” What does Galatians 1:14 tell us about this in Paul’s “pedigree”?

What does Philippians 3:4–6 say?

Or Acts 22:2–3?

6. How did Paul say he would “stack up” against their claim to be loyal “servants” of Christ (v. 23)?

List some of the things he actually endured as he carried out his service of ministry in the name of Christ (vv. 23b–25, 27).

What “dangers” did he have to deal with, according to verse 26?

What else does Paul say really sapped his energy and drained him emotionally (vv. 28–29)?

2 Corinthians 11:30–12:13

7. Which experience did Paul say really had an impact on him (11:30–33)? Why?

-
8. What very special event took place for Paul early in his ministry?
-

9. What does Paul call the debilitating ailment that he had to deal with from time to time (v. 7)?

What was the spiritual value of this for Paul (vv. 7, 9)?

How did he feel about it?

Can we apply this principle to our own life if God doesn't give favorable response to our prayers for deliverance from some problem or ailment? Explain your answer:

-
10. Whom does Paul implicate as he thinks about the "fool's speech," he had made (vv. 11– 13)?

What does he say they should have done?

PAUL'S "FOOL'S SPEECH" – 2 CORINTHIANS 11:21B–29	92
PAUL'S SPECIAL VISION – 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1–6	94
PAUL'S "THORN-IN-THE-FLESH" – 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7–10	95
THE "FOOL'S SPEECH CONCLUDED"	
2 CORINTHIANS 12:11–13	95
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 12:14–13:14	96

“...he realized that at any time of personal weakness, he could always count on the tremendous power of God.”



THE APOSTLE'S OUTSTANDING CREDENTIALS

In our previous lesson, we took note of Paul's attempt to get the people of Corinth to see what conniving scoundrels the false teachers really were. His scathing expose came to a resounding crescendo in chapter 11:13–15. Here, he made the startling declaration that these impostors, who “masqueraded as apostles of Christ,” were, in reality, agents of Satan himself! What a shocker this must have been for the people in Corinth!

ANOTHER “SURPRISE TWIST” IN PAUL'S APPEAL

2 CORINTHIANS 11:16–18

Paul turns from his denunciation of the false teachers to showcasing the quality of his ministry in their midst. It must have caught them by surprise almost as much as what he had to say about the smooth-talking false teachers. Paul expresses his surprise that he would find himself doing something like this. It simply wasn't “his style.” He comments that this exercise of putting the spotlight on himself, to call their attention to his positive qualifications, made him feel like a “fool.” The Greek word he used here for “fool,” literally meant, “without reason — like an animal.” Our pejorative term “jackass” probably comes close to what Paul wanted to express about how uncomfortable he was focusing attention upon himself. In an “aside” or parenthetical statement (v. 17), he mentions that this is not something that God had told him to do. He takes full responsibility for behaving like a fool who “toots his own horn,” as one paraphrase of this verse puts it. Nevertheless, since this statement made it into the canonical Scriptures, we know that in the fashion of politicians running for office, the Holy Spirit “approved this message!”

Paul explains that he's decided to "toot his own horn" because there was a lot of that going on at that time. "Many are boasting in the way the world does" (v. 18). Remember that when the false teachers came to Corinth, they flashed their credentials and letters of recommendation, hoping to gain quick acceptance on the part of the Corinthians (3:1 & 11:5). It must have been at least with a twinge of shame that they heard Paul remind them of how terribly gullible they had been as they were so "taken in" by these "con artists." Paul said they had "put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward and slaps you in the face" (11:20). Paul indulges in some gentle sarcasm here to make his point. This seems to indicate that he must have felt secure in his newly restored relationship with the people. One of the claims that these renegade teachers made against Paul was that he was "weak." So, as he reminds them of the abuse they had taken at the hands of these teachers, he suggests if he had been a little rough on them, they might also have listened to him. It was with "tongue-in-cheek" that he adds that his foolish boasting should be no problem for them: "You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise" (11:19). In his mind, he may have imagined that he could even hear them say with some chagrin: "Touché!"

PAUL'S "FOOL'S SPEECH"

2 CORINTHIANS 11:21B–29

Paul has to let them know, once again, how distasteful it is for him to lower himself to the level of his unscrupulous opponents as he recounts for them his superior qualifications as a minister of Christ. He writes: "I am speaking as a fool" (11:21 b). Regarding their claims about their lineage or personal pedigree, Paul could say, "Are they Hebrews, so am I" (v. 22). This counter-claim of Paul indicates that this had been a "big deal" as they schemed to win the confidence of the Corinthians. They made a lot of the fact that they were "Hebrews." The term "Hebrew" at this time in

the life of the church referred to the Christians who spoke Aramaic, many of whom were associated with the Christian movement in and around Jerusalem. Their bragging seems to imply that this made them part of "the elite" in the church. With slight variations, this is the implication of the terms "Israelite" and "Abraham's descendant," also mentioned in verse 22. This boasting about their pedigree not only points to their pride in externals such as the accident of birth, it also hints at the real thrust of the message they were promoting in Corinth. Their message was in direct opposition to what Paul had taught them about the all-sufficiency of the Gospel. They insisted that the true believers were those who accepted Christ, but also were conscientious about observing the Ceremonial Laws of the Old Testament. They were called "Judaizers."

Evidently, these teachers hadn't done their "homework." If they had, they would have known that Paul's personal "pedigree" was every bit as prestigious as their own — and then some. Paul was the quintessential "Hebrew." His Jewish roots ran deep! In Philippians 3:5 Paul calls himself "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" and mentions that he was of the Tribe of Benjamin. This was "special" because the Holy City of Jerusalem touched the border of the tribal territory of Benjamin. The Tribe of Benjamin took this to mean that out of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, God had singled them out for this special honor of being the place on earth where "His Presence would dwell." Had they done their homework, they would also have discovered that Paul's academic achievements were about as good as it gets. He had the privilege of studying under the renowned Jewish scholar, Gamaliel (Acts 22:2–3). As a Pharisee, he was recognized in Jewish society as "Ph.D." — a doctor of Jewish Law. Paul wanted the Corinthians to face up to this reality. They had been swept off of their feet by the impressive credentials that the false teachers waved under their noses. The reality was that these men didn't have anything on Paul. In fact, in many ways, even at this level, Paul was far superior to them!

In the verses that follow, Paul moves into another area where the record will show that he was “flat out” superior to the self-styled “super-apostles.” Once again, as he makes this shift, he lets them know how ill-at-ease he felt about his “bragging.” This time, he declares, probably with a shake of his head and shrug of his shoulders, “I am out of my mind to talk like this” (v. 23). However, he implies that if this is what it will take to straighten out the thinking of the Corinthians, he’s going to push on to get the job done.

When the false teachers came to the city, they evidently introduced themselves to the people as “ministers of Christ.” Without acknowledging their claim to this role as genuine, Paul simply invites his people to compare their performance with his dedicated service. J.B. Phillips in his *Letters to Young Churches* introduces this section like this: “Are they ministers of Christ, I have more claim to the title than they. This is a silly game, but look at the list.” The list is quite impressive. In verses 23–26, Paul relates a whole string of adverse circumstances that he encountered in the “line of duty” as a minister of Christ Jesus. This included hostile actions against him instigated by leaders of the Jewish church who regarded him as a traitor. He recalls that this resulted in jail time, beatings with rods, and flogging with whips, and even being battered and bruised by stones hurled at him. As he traveled by boat, there were three shipwrecks, in one of which he would most certainly have drowned, had he not kept his grip on some floating debris. As he traveled on land, he was in constant danger of being attacked by brutal and vicious highway robbers, as well as being waylaid by fellow-Jews who resented his defection to the Christian faith. He couldn’t even trust members of the churches he had started. He says he was “in danger from false brothers” (v. 26).

In verse 27, Paul begins a list of adversities and rough times which simply “came with the territory,” as we might describe it today. Among these, he

included his heartfelt concern for all of the people he had met along the way and who had become converts. He knew the challenges that faced many of the new believers. He kept them in his thoughts and prayers, not just as a group, but individually, by name. All of this was quite emotionally draining for Paul. If this had been a military campaign, his uniform would have been covered with, and sagging from the weight of, campaign ribbons and medals, including a Purple Heart. Not one of the renegade teachers in Corinth could “hold a candle to” his amazing record of service and devotion to duty. Paul was hoping that this would mean something to his one-time friends in Corinth.

In another surprising twist, Paul quickly directs attention away from his record of heroic dedication to an experience that he had early in his career as a servant of Christ Jesus. While it may not come across to us as all that big of a deal, it is obvious that the apostle saw it as a “defining moment” in his great career. After his conversion, he went to the Arabian Desert (Galatians 1:17). Bible students sometimes refer to that time as Paul’s “seminary training at the feet of the Holy Spirit.”

After three years, he was led to return to Damascus and the Christian fellowship there. Even after three years, the hostility of the leaders of the Jewish synagogue in Damascus had not diminished one “iota.” There was a “bounty” on his head. Word got to the leaders that Paul was back in town. They used their political “pull” with King Aretas, to have the governor of the city post guards at every city gate. They were to work “24/7” and were ordered to arrest Paul if he tried to leave the city.

As God would have it, the home of the Christian family Paul was staying with “happened” to be on the city wall. In the cover of darkness, his friends put him into a good-sized basket and used ropes to let him down the outer side of the city wall. In that way, Paul slipped through the fingers of his enemies in Damascus. As he reports here, this was a “defining

moment.” He came to the full realization of how things would be for him from this point forward. He would be a fugitive. But more importantly, he realized that at any time of personal weakness, he could always count on the tremendous power of God. It was a principle that applied not only to his escape from Damascus, but also and especially, to all the other close calls he had just listed. Paul wanted his dear friends in Corinth to know that this was the guiding principle that drove him in all that he did. It redirected praise and glory away from Paul to the Lord Himself.

PAUL’S SPECIAL VISION

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1–6

Paul indicates that he’s not through with his boasting. He expresses his opinion that there’s probably no point in boasting. However, since Paul’s adversaries in Corinth had set the agenda, Paul indicates that he has something like a “trump card” in his hand that he is about to play. This would “top” anything that his opponents had to offer. The enemies of Paul had very likely claimed that some of their ideas and teachings had come to them through direct contact with God, who had come to them in visions. When you check the record, you soon discover that Paul had quite a list of “visions” which he could have paraded before them. However, for whatever reason, Paul calls to mind here a vision that took place fourteen years earlier, several years after his conversion. Perhaps, because it was such a sacred and personal experience, Paul refers to himself in the third person: “I know a man in Christ...” (v. 2). He writes that this “man” (Paul) was “caught up to the third heaven.” The word that Paul uses for “caught up” is the same word which he used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to describe what would happen to the believers who are alive on earth when Christ returns. They will be “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air. Paul wrote that this “man” was “caught up to the third heaven.” We don’t need to spend a lot of time trying to figure out what is meant by the “third

heaven.” In the next sentence, we see that Paul equates it with “paradise.” We can be quite sure that the people of that time understood what he meant by the word. It’s probably just a typical Hebrew use of the superlative “the highest heaven,” the dwelling place of the “most high.”

For some reason Paul makes the observation that it was all quite mysterious to him as he thinks back to that ecstatic experience. “Whether it was in the body or out of the body, I do not know” (vv. 2–3). In recent years, we have heard reports of “out of body” experiences from people who had been close to death. Paul allows for the possibility that he may have been carried away “in the spirit.” Some scholars see special significance in the fact that Paul twice mentions that it could have been a spiritual experience or it might have involved his physical body.

At the time he wrote, the Gnostic Movement was making inroads to the Church. The Gnostics taught that the physical body was inherently evil and could have no contact with the sacred. Obviously, Paul didn’t “buy into” such a notion. For him it could very well have been a physical transport to the “high heavens.”

Paul doesn’t come right out and say it, but he had a very good reason for giving space to his rehearsal of the grand and glorious experience which he said had taken place fourteen years earlier. His opponents in Corinth had somehow heard about some of the hardships and difficulties Paul had been having in his missionary journeys. “Spinmeisters” that they were, they used this information against Paul. They made it part of their “smear campaign” against him. They told the people that all this trouble was a sign that the apostle did not have the blessings of God upon his work. Maybe this lofty experience would help to offset such a notion and make it quite plain that Paul did have the blessing of God, after all!

PAUL'S "THORN-IN-THE-FLESH"*2 CORINTHIANS 12:7–10*

As Paul proceeds in his effort to reclaim the hearts of the Corinthians, he brings up a subject that at first might seem to have played right into the hands of his opponents. In contrast to the glorious vision of heaven that had been given Paul, he describes something that was pretty unpleasant and seemingly non-productive. "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me" (v. 7). Evidently, Paul didn't consider it important for them and us to know the specifics about this "thorn-in-the-flesh." As one might expect, there has been quite a bit of speculation as to what it might have been. Among the physical ailments that have been suggested are eye trouble, recurring fever, stammering, and epilepsy. Take your pick.

Paul speaks of his "thorn-in-the-flesh" as "a messenger of Satan." In and of itself, this "thorn" had the potential of bringing about a negative response from Paul. It held the element of "temptation" for Paul. When the "thorn" afflicted him and kept him from his ministry, it could lead to a sense of frustration and impatience with God. It could plunge Paul into a deep depression that would only make matters worse. However it manifested itself, Paul saw it as a "messenger of Satan" because of the negative effect it could trigger. Paul mentions that three times he offered fervent prayer to the Lord to have this "thorn" removed.

As it was with Job in the Old Testament, the ultimate source of evil was Satan. But it was all-powerful God who "permitted" the evil to come to Paul, because of its potential for good. The Holy Spirit had given Paul the insight to recognize this important truth. Paul declares that after three fervent prayer sessions failed to bring about a favorable response, he knew that he had to "accept" this physical problem. This was

something God allowed to happen for his own good, to keep him humble. In fact, he was able to glory in it. He wholeheartedly concurred with God's interpretation: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). It went like this for Paul: The weaker that Paul felt, the more helpless feeling he had, the greater the opportunity for the power of God to shine in his direction, and to shine through him for others to see. "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (v. 10). In this connection, one commentator sums this up, pointing out that "By setting out the divine principle of power manifested through weakness, Paul has at once defended his own claim to apostleship and he has cut the ground from under the claims of his opponents."

THE "FOOL'S SPEECH CONCLUDED"*2 CORINTHIANS 12:11–13*

Still feeling the "smart" of personal embarrassment by the exercise of having to turn attention to his own person and performance, Paul brings it to a conclusion. He reminds the people in Corinth that they had to assume some of the responsibility for this "fool's speech." "I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it" (v. 11). Then he adds that he wouldn't have had to put himself through this ordeal if they had risen to his defense when his enemies started to put him down. They surely knew better. The things that mark an apostle — signs, wonders and miracles — were done among you with perseverance (v. 12). He hadn't sold them short. He admits that there was one thing that he did do differently when he came to them. It was his policy not to accept any money from them for his services. "I was never a burden to you" (v. 13). That should have been a plus. Surely, it must have been with "tongue-in-cheek" that he said: "Forgive me this wrong!" With this, Paul rested his case, probably feeling confident that the people he loved were "back in his corner."

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 12:14–13:14

Spirit of God, please come to me in a special way, as I begin my study of this last portion of the apostle Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians. Help me grow in my personal appreciation of the truths set forth in the letter. Let it be for me a message which comes from You with my own name on it; so that I truly take to heart what You want to teach me. Help me grow in my appreciation of all of Your servants who were and are eager to share their faith so that I may be strengthened in my faith and be inspired to strive for moral perfection, as Paul teaches. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Review

1. From Paul's instruction about Christian giving in chapter 9, please list what you consider the most important principles that New Testament Christians should keep in mind.

Do you think that tithing meets these guidelines? Explain:

2. Why does Paul find it so difficult to accept the idea that his good friends listened to the derogatory things the false teachers said against him? (12:11–12)

2 Corinthians 12:14–18

3. In Chapter 12:14, Paul reminds the Corinthians that he was preparing to pay them a visit in the near future. What number visit would this be?

According to 2 Corinthians 9:4–5, what was the primary occasion for the third visit?

Paul said that representatives of which churches would probably accompany him (9:4).

Concerning the special offering he was promoting, how did Paul use this as motivation for the Corinthians?

4. What does Paul say was the main reason he didn't accept financial support from the Corinthians (12:14)?

What truism does he quote as rationale for this policy (v. 14)?

When Paul uses this saying, at what else is he hinting?

What made it quite natural for Paul to think about himself as a “father” to the believers in Corinth?

How does he describe the extent of his love for them (v. 15)?

5. What do you think Paul was trying to communicate to the people of Corinth with his rhetorical question in verse 15b?
-

To what might we attribute the failure of a proper response to the love Paul showed them?

6. In verse 16b, Paul sarcastically refers to what his opponents were saying about his reason for not accepting money “up front” for his services. Can you figure out how they twisted the truth to their personal advantage?
-

Verse 18 implies that Titus and the “brothers” were probably accomplices in the scam. How does chapter 8:16–24 rule this out?

2 Corinthians 12:19–21

7. What does Paul have to say about the purpose behind his “fool’s speech” in chapters 10–12 (v. 19a)?
-

For whose benefit did Paul put himself through the ordeal of boasting about his pedigree, his trials and tribulations, as well as his special visions (v. 19b)?

What might have been different in the congregation at Corinth (vv. 20–21) if the people there would have acknowledged Paul’s apostolic authority?

According to 12:20, what was pretty sure to happen when Paul got there for his visit, if there wasn’t a change of attitude?

2 Corinthians 13:1–10

8. What biblical rule does Paul associate with his visit (v. 1)? (Deuteronomy 19:15)
-

Who endorsed this rule in Matthew 18:16?

How did it apply here?

9. Instead of focusing on him and trying to find fault with him, what did Paul tell them to do that might be more productive (v. 5)?
-

What did Paul say he will be praying for on their behalf (vv. 9–11)?

What does this tell us about the importance of good works in the eyes of Paul?

What did James have to say on this topic (James 2:17)?

2 Corinthians 13:11–14

10. What did Paul recommend that they do to give expression to the close bond that existed between the faithful members of the congregation (vv. 11-12)?
-

What can you do to implement this within your church?

Verse 14 brings us a threefold blessing, similar to the priestly benediction in the O.T. (Numbers 6:22–27). What may have moved Paul to give first place to the work of Jesus?



THEY SHOULD KNOW WHY HE GAVE HIS DEFENSE	
2 CORINTHIANS 12:19–21	100
PAUL'S STERN WARNINGS – 2 CORINTHIANS 13:1–4	102
APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY'S PRIMARY FUNCTION	
2 CORINTHIANS 13:5–10	102
A FOND FAREWELL – 2 CORINTHIANS 13:11–13	103
PAUL'S SPECIAL BLESSING – 2 CORINTHIANS 13:14	103

● ● ● ● ● ● ●

“God’s grace not only made Paul acceptable in the sight of God and delivered him from the wrath of God; it enabled Jesus to appoint him as ambassador to the Gentiles.”

● ● ● ● ● ● ●

PAUL'S FINAL EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN FOR THE CORINTHIANS

As the apostle Paul brings this passionate letter to a close, it is only natural for him to call their attention to some of the concerns he still has for them.

ABOUT HIS POLICY TO NOT ACCEPT MONEY FROM THEM

2 CORINTHIANS 12:14–18

He mentions that when he returns to Corinth for his third visit with them, he will continue his policy of not accepting any money from them for his support. The policy had been a point of contention raised by the so-called “super-apostles,” who were in it for as much money as they could squeeze out of the people. Remember the previous discussion about this (11:1–12)? Paul explains why he had adopted this policy in dealing with the Corinthians. Contrary to what the false teachers were saying about Paul’s policy, he had several personal reasons for not accepting donations from the Corinthian people. He explains that for one thing he didn’t want to be a burden to them. Even more important for Paul, “what I want is not your possessions but you” (v. 14).

To support his decision in this matter, Paul tosses out what probably was a well-known saying back then: “Children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children” (v. 14). He also wants

to communicate to them something at a deeper level. He wants them to know that he thinks of them as “family.” He’s their spiritual father, and they are his spiritual children. It suggests the majority of the congregation were those whom Paul was instrumental in bringing into the faith. He feels a close bond with them, and is hoping that the feeling is mutual. He takes it even a step higher as he adds: “I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well” (v. 15). All this was to show how different Paul’s intentions were when compared with the impostors, who were in it for the money. With this, Paul also “sets the bar” quite high as a role model for all pastors.

One would think that Paul’s demonstration of love for the people would have called forth a response of love on their part, which would have resisted the wiles of the false teachers. Paul used a rhetorical question to make his point (v. 15): “If I love you more, will you love me less?” By putting it in the form of a question, Paul avoids a blunt condemnation and thus keeps them from going on the defensive. While a majority of the people had a change of heart, there were still some who were “under the spell” of smooth-talking and influential false teachers. There were others who needed to have their renewed relationship with the apostle reinforced.

Paul now attempts to answer another negative twist that his opponents gave to his policy of not taking money from the people of Corinth. They spread the word that Paul was using the organized fund-raising for the famine-stricken people in the Jerusalem Church as a “scam.” Sure, he didn’t accept anything directly from them, but Titus and the “brothers” he sent to collect money from them would skim off a goodly amount for Paul. They would stop at nothing to discredit Paul. Paul asked them: “Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent you (v. 17)?

The answer is an emphatic “NO!” Titus and the “brothers” were hand-picked by the churches in Macedonia because of their proven honesty and integrity (See 8:16–24).

THEY SHOULD KNOW WHY HE GAVE HIS DEFENSE

2 CORINTHIANS 12:19–21

In this section, Paul wants them to understand why he had put himself through the very uncomfortable experience of defending himself. He declares that they might have gotten the impression that he did all of this simply to win their favor and regain his status with them. As important as that was to Paul, from a human point-of-view, he states that he had a much higher purpose in mind. “We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ.” It was Paul’s intention to show that in rehearsing various aspects of his ministry, he would be able to demonstrate that he was a faithful servant of the Most High and that he was truly a spokesman for none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

He goes on to explain that this was important to him, not just because his reputation had been sullied by those who were out to discredit him. Furthermore, he would not have had to resort to this if he wanted honor and glory in the sight of God, and in their eyes, as well. This wasn’t about him at all. Again, he reminds them that this was really for their benefit. “Everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening” (v. 19b). As Paul did earlier by referring to them as “children,” he appeals to their emotions by calling them “dear friends.”

Paul links what he says about being recognized as God’s apostle with what follows by starting verse 20 with “For.” They needed to understand why it was important for them to recognize Paul as having the authority of one sent from God for their spiritual growth and well-being. Paul

explains: “I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be.” Paul admits to a little uncertainty about the effectiveness of his personal defense on some of the people who were part of the congregation. Earlier in our letter, he had commented on Titus’s report of the favorable response of many of them (7:9–13). He was thrilled at the favorable response, remember? This did not mean that every member had responded favorably. There were some gullible people who were still impressed by the false teachers. Some of those had listened to Paul’s appeal, but who may not have been as strong in their personal resolve as they needed to be. At any rate, Paul’s job wasn’t quite done. Ever optimistic in the power of the Gospel and the grace of God, Paul here reaches out to all who still needed to be helped back to God.

Along with this loving appeal came a solemn warning from the apostle. He had mentioned it earlier (10:2, 6). Paul warns them what will happen if, upon his arrival for the third visit, he finds them not the way he prays “they will be.” They will see an apostle Paul, who won’t be what they want to see (12:20). This is Paul’s way of enlisting their support in doing what they can not only in their lives; but also in the lives of others who may need a little extra attention and encouragement.

For some reason, Paul felt the need to get right to the point and mention some specific areas of the Christian life where improvements were necessary. It is significant that the first two items on Paul’s list were (quarreling and jealousy). These are the very things he dealt with in connection with the “party spirit” in his first letter to them (1 Corinthians 1:11 & 3:3). Whatever the case may be, Paul clearly states that he is “afraid” that some of the problems he dealt with in the past might still be prevalent to some extent. The prospect of finding this to be the case when he arrives for his third visit doesn’t exactly thrill him. “I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged” (v. 21).

We don’t know if Paul had actually heard reports that this was taking place with the people in the church at Corinth. We do know that he had a pretty good understanding of the moral depravity of the pagan culture from which they came, and in which they continued to live. He mentions it here in his final appeal to the entire group in Corinth, hoping that the church leaders will take note and deal with such matters. If “housecleaning” was necessary, so be it!

PAUL'S STERN WARNINGS*2 CORINTHIANS 13:1–4*

Paul mentions again that his upcoming visit “will be my third visit to you.” This time he ties it in with a reference to Deuteronomy 19:15, where the children of Israel received this directive from God: “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” The apostle refers to the “threeness” of his visits, to establish the point concerning potential disciplinary procedure; he has more than met the divine requirement of fairness.

Paul was ready to take action. He writes, “On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others” (13:2). He will fulfill his prediction that they would get to see him in action with powerful apostolic authority. If it happened, it should be enough to disabuse them of the charges the enemies brought against Paul that he was too weak to be a true apostle (13:3). In an interesting twist, Paul implies that they really wouldn't have needed the above experience to have proof of the apostolic power in Paul. He tells them they were living proof. Christ was powerful in them and in their lives. Their conversions had happened through the testimony of Paul.

Jesus Himself was a beautiful illustration of the important truth which guided Paul in his ministry that weakness is the channel for the power of God. When Jesus' broken body hung lifelessly on the cross of Calvary on Good Friday, it looked to all the world as if He had been defeated. When His limp body was delivered to the tomb in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea, the hopes of the disciples of Jesus were buried with it. They couldn't have felt more defeated and disappointed. “Yet,” says Paul, “He lives by God's power.” Paul applies this to himself. Admittedly, Paul did not show the power of eloquence and impressive showmanship. By earthly standards he was weak, but “by God's power we will live with him to serve you” (13:4).

**APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY'S
PRIMARY FUNCTION***2 CORINTHIANS 13:5–10,*

Along the same line of thought which he introduced in verse 3, Paul offers some fatherly advice to his “Beloved” in Corinth. He tells them: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves” (v. 5). The structure of the sentence in Greek conveys the thought that instead of looking for failures and deficiencies in Paul, it would be more helpful if they checked out themselves. The touchstone would be the presence or absence of the faith that Paul had introduced them to through his messages. The presence of the living Christ in them was proof of the authenticity of Paul's apostleship. The implication is that if, God forbid, they were not to find this to be the case, nothing else really mattered. The way Paul says it, he is confident that Christ was alive in them. He would give them the benefit of the doubt, and asked them to do the same with him (v. 6).

Once again, Paul tries to direct attention away from himself and his performance as an apostle. He tells them that he is praying to God, “that you will not do anything wrong.” To clarify that he's not thinking about his reputation, he says that this is his wish for their personal benefit. He doesn't care what they say about him. Even though they might consider Paul a miserable failure, the important thing is that the people are living the Christian life (v. 7). In verse 8, Paul tells his dear friends that there's absolutely no way that he could ever do anything to get in the way of or detract from the truth of the Gospel. At this point, Paul can't help but repeat his motto. “We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection” (v. 9). This is his rationale for taking the trouble to get his thoughts to them in this letter. There is a hint of optimism on Paul's part here as he reminds them that he hopes his letter will accomplish its goal. He will be delighted if he doesn't have to “come down”

on them. As far as he is concerned, he doesn't find a lot of pleasure in exercising his authority in disciplinary matters. He'd much rather use "the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down" (v. 10).

A FOND FAREWELL

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11–13

Paul is ready to bring this passionate letter to a close. As usual, he wraps things up on a positive and encouraging note. The term "brothers" is all-inclusive and refers to the whole congregation of men, women, and children. He bids them goodbye.

Paul emphasized the importance of bringing behavior in line with the will of God. He told them to "aim for perfection" in their personal lives. No quarrel here with James. As far as Paul was concerned, it was vitally important for them to cultivate good works, which reflect the existence of faith in their hearts. He encouraged them to "be of one mind." It wasn't an appeal for them to stop using their minds and just go along with the crowd. They could and ought to be of "one mind" in their determination to please God and respect one another. In turn, this would make for a climate of "peace" in the fellowship of believers and promote a spirit of working together. The God of peace and love would empower them to have this blessing in fellowship (13:11).

As an outward expression of the inner bond that they have in their relationship with one another, Paul tells them: "Greet one another with a holy kiss." This greeting was a socially acceptable way of showing affection and respect among people in New Testament times. Paul's colleague, Peter, also closed his first letter with an encouragement to "greet one another with the kiss of love" (1 Peter 5:14). The "Living Bible" (a paraphrase) renders this, "Greet each other warmly in the Lord." Similarly, the American Bible Society's recent "Contemporary English Version" reads: "Give each other a warm greeting." What Paul was promoting and encouraging the Christian people in Corinth to recognize what a blessing it is to be a believer, and what a privilege it is to be with others who are "related" to God in the same way.

PAUL'S SPECIAL BLESSING

2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

Paul ends his letter with a very special blessing, which is loaded with profound meaning. It is commonly known as "The Apostolic Benediction," to distinguish it from the priestly blessing which God gave to Aaron in Numbers 6:22–27. It is essentially and uniquely a description of the apostle's personal experience with the Almighty God. What loomed in Paul's memory is what happened when he became involved

• • • • •

“May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!” And all God’s people said “Amen!”

• • • • •

with God and found “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It was pure grace on the part of Jesus who sought him when he was traveling to Damascus to pursue his goal of exterminating as many followers of Jesus as he possibly could. Grace defined is “the unmerited favor of God.” It is not just that we haven’t done anything to deserve His favor; Grace refers to the goodness of God to individuals who have been downright hostile to Him. It showed itself in the willingness of Jesus to give his life for the most vicious spiritual terrorists on the face of the earth. It was unbelievable. This favor of God went so far beyond his comprehension. God’s grace not only made Paul acceptable in the sight of God and delivered him from the wrath of God; it enabled Jesus to appoint him as ambassador to the Gentiles.

For Paul, it was “The *love* of God the Father that was right up there” with “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It was a major theme in all of Paul’s ministry, his correspondence, and his theology. It wasn’t only that God demonstrated His great love when He “sent His only-begotten Son” to take His place in the world of men and then to take their place under His judgment. It was also that He made us His very sons and daughters, to whom He would pledge to use His Almighty power on our behalf. In Romans 8, Paul celebrated the durability of that Love: “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither

angels nor demons...nor any powers...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 38–39).

Finally, Paul’s third wish for them was “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” It was essentially a prayer that they would open their hearts wide to give more of their lives over to the influence of the Holy Spirit. The result would be a greater sense of fellowship with God. There would be more “participation” of God in their lives and, in the end; there would be more productive sharing with others. The bond between them and other like-minded people would truly be a “communion of saints.”

Paul wanted to make certain that there would be no room for anyone to think they weren’t good enough for the things he mentioned in his wish for the people of Corinth. This could be the significance of the phrase, “be with you all.”

What he wished for them was within the range of possibility for all, and it is within the range of possibility for all of us, as well. It would be virtually impossible to find a better way to “wrap up” this Bible study. “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!” And all God’s people said “Amen!”