

Individual or Group Bible Study

2 CORINTHIANS

THE PARADOX OF LIFE IN CHRIST

BLESSING IN THE BUFFETINGS
STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

2 Corinthians 12:9



KINGSTON
community church

small group bible study
life-on-life discipleship

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE BIBLE READER'S COMPANION By Lawrence Richards

FAITHLIFE STUDY BIBLE By John Barry, Douglas Mangum, Derek Brown, Michael Heiser, Miles Custis, Elliot Ritzema, Matthew Whitehead, Michael Grigoni, & David Bomar.

2 CORINTHIANS: WEAK IS STRONG By Four Oaks Church

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN ANTIQUITY By G. M. Burge



Developed by
KINGSTON COMMUNITY CHURCH

To love and honor God in being disciples and
helping make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Address: Corner of Kingston St and London Terrace
PO Box 1155
Palmerston North

Phone: 06 358 0716

Email: kstreet@xtra.co.nz

Website: <http://kingstoncommunitychurch.com/>

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At the very heart of this study is intentional discipleship. The intentional transformation of a person into the character of Christ *... until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood (womanhood), to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:13 (ESV)*

We desire for you to be maturing spiritually, having both the spiritual life and spiritual skills of a disciple. To be a mature and equipped follower of Christ. A person who is living consistently under the control of the Holy Spirit [Matthew 6:33], the direction of the Word of God [Jeremiah 15:16], and the motivation of the love of Christ [Galatians 2:20].

Our prayer is that you will not just acquire a lot of Bible knowledge. Although understanding the Bible is a significant factor that drives spiritual growth, simple head knowledge is not sufficient in itself. There is a difference between knowing and living God's word. Therefore, our focus in this Bible Study is on applying God's truth, not merely understanding it (head knowledge).

This is not a Bible Study you simply do as a group. It requires your engagement in three components before you meet with your small group:



READ SCRIPTURE

In preparation and continued engagement in studying the passage, take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage each day across the week. We would encourage you to use at least two different versions of the Bible (ESV – English Standard Version / NIV New International Version / CEV – Contemporary English Version).

There is nothing magical in reading, it is in the rereading that something magical may be had. Paul Windsor



LISTEN TO THE MESSAGE

Bring your study book along to church family and listen and take notes from the Sunday morning message. If you miss a message you can listen online to the recorded sermon. This allows us to each be under the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit as he speaks through gifted preachers.



COMPLETE THE STUDY GUIDE

Across the week, work through the study guide questions assigned to each passage. Be prayerful as you seek truth in and through the Word. Jot down any questions or additional observations you make so you can share them with your small group. The questions aim to engage you more and more deeply in the truths of the Word. Don't rush this process, give yourself plenty of time.

The study is broken up into sections...

DISCOVER TRUTH: What are some of the key aspects of the passage. This section will seek to get you into the passage.

WORD STUDY: Going deeper in what God is revealing for us to know, understand and obey.

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH: From hearing and learning truth, this section will seek to grow our understanding and usability in our lives.

APPLY TRUTH: What is the passage asking me/us to do? Truth leading to obedience and transformation.

EXTRA: An optional chance to stretch yourself both biblically and practically through the passage.

ENGAGE WITH GOD: Engaging in conversation with God. This will include praying with and for the other members of your small group as we seek God's work in and through us.

ADDITIONAL TEACHING: A chance to listen or view further teaching on the passage.

Additional tools (Overview and Commentary) have been provided to support you in your study of God’s Word.

Being part of a small group is about working with a small group of people for the purpose of seeing them grow spiritually and mature in their walk with Christ [Ephesians 4:12-13]. The aim is to allow each other to be mutually engaged in our lives with the intention of imparting one’s life, God’s Word and the gospel in such a way as to see each of us becoming more mature and equipped followers of Christ.

VISION

We are a church "of" small groups that is seeking to...



Through the enabling of the Holy Spirit we are to be mutually growing in a Christ-like attitude...

- Love [Rom5; 1 Thess 4.9; 1Jn 3.11]
- Forgiveness [Col 3.13]
- Honesty [Eph 4.25; Col 3.9]
- Submission [Eph 5.21]
- Encouraging [1 Thess. 4.18]
- Peace [Rom. 12.8]
- Caring [1 Cor 12.25]
- Commitment [Heb 13.1]
- Unity [1 Cor 1.10]

With God as our example and enabler, we, as the body of Christ, are called to mutually minister to one another. Through the realities of everyday life we seek to grow into the fullness of Christ-likeness by building one another up.

Minister the love of
CHRIST to one another

in ATTITUDE and ACTION through SMALL GROUP COMMUNITIES

Small groups are an integral part of our church life. They emphasises the value we place on biblical community as essential for each member of the body. They are a vehicle for growing community, discipleship and mission.

Through the enabling of the Holy Spirit we are to be mutually growing in Christ-like actions...

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Serve [Gal 5.13; 1 Thess 5.15; 1 Jn 3.16] | Comfort [Rom5; 1 Thess 4.9; 1Jn 3.11] |
| Help [Eph 4.2; Phil 2.4] | Edification [1 Thess 5.11] |
| Fellowship [Eph 5.19; Heb 10.25; 1Jn 1.7] | Teaching [Col 3.16] |
| Hospitality [1 Peter 4.9] | Confession [James 5.16] |

It requires a commitment to each other as you encourage one another, share honestly about the challenges you each face, and support one another through the hard times (and victories) as you all grow spiritually.

Join us in studying the 2 Corinthians.



Check out this excellent overview of 2 Corinthians.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lfPK2vfC54>

Alternatively search youtube.com - key words “bible project” and 2 Corinthians”.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To understand 2 Corinthians we must identify the outsiders opposed to Paul. Their recent presence within the church surprised and worried him. During his third missionary tour Paul remained in Ephesus over two years but also maintained contact with the Corinthians. If the wind was blowing favourably Corinth was merely five to six hours across the Aegean by ship. He had visitors from Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11) as well as couriers who brought him a letter (7:1)—likely Stephanas, Fortunatus,

and Achaicus (16:17). Paul replied with 1 Corinthians, which the three men took back to Corinth. But soon Timothy arrives with news that Paul's authority has been seriously challenged (16:10–11).

At this point scholars are unclear what happens. Most believe that Paul made a quick trip to Corinth (unrecorded in Acts) to confront the Corinthians directly. But he was rejected by the church and calls this a “painful” visit (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14, 21; 13:1–2). After returning to Ephesus, he writes a “tearful letter” of rebuke (2:4) and sends it with Titus, a deeply trusted colleague. Paul not only admonishes the Corinthians for failing to defend him, but also tests their loyalty by asking them to punish those who insulted him (2:1–11; 7:8–13). He wants Titus to gauge the church's reaction to his exhortation and then meet him in Macedonia.

Paul leaves Ephesus and travels north to Troas and then on to Macedonia to meet Titus (2:12–13) to find out the condition of the church before he arrives in Corinth. Titus brings good news that the church is filled with shame over their treatment of Paul (7:5–7). But Titus also has some bad news. People with letters of recommendation (3:1) have infiltrated the church, attacking Paul's ministry and authority.

Filled with relief and dread, Paul writes 2 Corinthians in the fall of AD 56. He then travels from Macedonia to Corinth for a third visit and stays three months, leading many scholars to surmise Paul's relationship with the Corinthians has improved. From Corinth, Paul writes Romans.

THE UNITY OF 2 CORINTHIANS

Scholars wonder whether 2 Corinthians is a composite of several of Paul's Corinthian letters pieced together. Note how Paul changes from a conciliatory tone in chapters 1–9 to more combative remarks in chapters 10–13. He seems to equivocate in his attitude toward the Corinthians, for in 7:4, 16, he expresses confidence in them, while in 11:2–4, he fears they will be led astray.

Many scholars believe chapters 1–9 form a literary unit and chapters 10–13 are a separate letter later appended. Some view chapters 10–13 a part of Paul's earlier “tearful letter,” in which he is confronting those who rejected him during his “painful visit.” Others think these four chapters

originate from a setting following Paul’s reunion with Titus when new conditions arose at Corinth.

A LOST LETTER FRAGMENT?

Scholars who suggest that 2 Corinthians is made up of several of Paul’s letters often point to 6:14–7:1 as part of an earlier letter referred in 1 Corinthians 5:9. They contend that the abrupt transition between 6:13 and 14 indicates an editor attached the fragment. Those who argue for the unity of 2 Corinthians 1–9, however, point out that 6:14–7:1 fits well with Paul’s warning against idolatry in 7:3. It explains why the Corinthians are less than free with their affections toward Paul (6:12)—they are still enchanted with darkness, still drawn to idols (6:16).

Such fragmentary theories fail to explain how or why an ancient editor joined two separate letters. Did someone remove the greetings from chapter 10 and the closing from chapter 9, and then join the two together? The evidence from Greco-Roman letters is inconclusive. While preserved letters of Plato and Demosthenes have both greetings and closings, letters by Plato’s contemporary Isocrates are often missing both (Isocrates, *To Nicocles* 2.1).

Not a few scholars argue for the unity of the entire letter. No Greek manuscript evidence supports a division of the book, and there is only one opening formula (1:1–2) and one concluding formula (13:11–13). They also argue the letter shows an internal coherence.

In our view the “tearful letter” is lost. The change of tone between chapters 9 and 10 reflects Paul’s shift of focus as he turns from the Corinthians’ response to his “tearful letter” to address the threat of the “super-apostles.” To win their trust, Paul first establishes a rapport with the Corinthians (chs. 1–9) and then tackles the difficult topic of the “super-apostles” (chs. 10–13). This type of rhetoric is called epideictic, where the author focuses on both praise and blame to persuade his readers.

Note also that in letter-writing conventions in Paul’s day, some authors attached a postscript, indicating their own personal hand. Cicero attached postscripts even longer than chapters 10–13 (see *Letters to Friends* 12.12.5 [387]). Paul may have added a lengthy argument to his

“finished” letter because new information has reached him or because he wants to convey sensitive information.

RHETORICAL PROWESS

In chs. 1–9 Paul defends “weakness” as a Christian virtue. But in 10:10 we learn that he was criticized for being weak “in person.” What was his vulnerability?

In the ancient world, the orator’s words had to match his physical appearance. To Quintillian, “the orator depends not merely on his knowledge, which increases with the years, but on his voice, lungs and powers of endurance. And if these be broken or impaired by age or health, he must beware that he does not fall short in something of his high reputation as a master of oratory” (Rhetoric 12:11.2–3). The renowned physician Galen (AD 129–199/216), in his Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, explains the close connection between a strong proclamation reflected in a robust body, “Aristides from Mysia [AD 117–180] ... was one of the most outstanding orators. So it happened that lifelong activity in talking and declaiming caused his whole body to fade away.”

Paul’s opponents deemed him closer to the lower classes and thus weak. Paul in turn shows how his weakness serves to enhance the great power of Christ.

PAUL’S EXHORTATION FOR CORINTH

Second Corinthians follows the general letter pattern of the day: greetings, thanksgiving, body opening, body middle, body closing, and letter closing. It holds together with two supporting themes: Paul’s authority and Paul’s visits. In the opening chapters, Paul declares that despite grave dangers inherent in traveling (1:8–11), he yearns to see them (1:17–19). Chapter 6 lists the trials he faces in his travels (6:3–10). Titus’s previous trip (see 7:13) introduces Paul’s upcoming visit to take up the famine collection (8:1–9:15). In chapters 10–13, Paul warns that in his impending visit, he will not be lenient (13:2). Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians is indeed fragile.

OUTLINE OF 2 CORINTHIANS

- I. Greetings (1:1–2)
- II. Thanksgiving (1:3–7)
- III. Paul’s Reason for Not Visiting (1:8–2:13)
 - A. Death Sentence (1:8–11)
 - B. Failure to Visit (1:12–2:2)
 - C. “Tearful Letter” (2:3–13)
- IV. Paul’s Defence of His Ministry (2:14–6:13)
 - A. Ministry of the New Covenant (2:14–4:18)
 - B. Gospel Brings Reconciliation (5:1–6:13)
- V. Personal Appeal to the Corinthians (6:14–7:16)
- VI. Appeal for Contribution to Judea (8:1–9:15)
- VII. Defence of His Ministry (10:1–11:21)
 - A. Paul’s Boasting within Limits (10:1–18)
 - B. The Super-Apostles (11:1–21)
- VIII. Paul’s Boasts as a “Fool” (11:22–12:13)
- IX. Paul’s Plan for a Visit (12:14–13:10)
- X. Closing (13:11–13)

THE RECONCILIATION OF PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS (1:1–9:15)

These chapters are Paul’s most personal and autobiographical section, revealing relief, anxiety, grief, indignation, and delight. He recalls his long history with the church (1:1–2:17) in order to underscore his extensive investment in their lives. He then moves to the theological core of the letter (3:1–7:16), where he outlines the essence of Christian leadership and the paradox of Christian weakness. One important test of the Corinthians’ repentance and living by faith is whether they will follow through in the famine offering Paul is collecting (8:1–9:15).

Paul and His Travel Plans to Corinth (1:1–2:13)

As the Corinthians vacillate over their allegiance to Paul and his gospel, he explains why his travel plans changed, and he introduces two key themes: suffering and consolation. Paul did not visit them as initially planned because of unexpected suffering—a life-threatening menace faced in Asia (1:8–11). Most scholars think Paul was imprisoned and believed he might be executed. Moreover, he wants to spare them pain

(2:1–2), concerned he may have to rebuke them again, and wants to avoid such a confrontation.

Paul and Christian Leadership (2:14–7:16)

Paul is fearful that the Corinthians still may not understand the dangers of those who have infiltrated their church. He deprecates the outsiders' efforts with statements such as “unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit” (2:17). Paul compares his opponents to hucksters who preyed on people during festivals or the Isthmian games.

Paul asks, “Do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?” (3:1). His opponents claim a religious authority that rivals Paul, comparing their own experience with that of Moses. Paul challenges such a model by announcing that his ministry of the Spirit has far more glory than Moses' message and fulfils the prophet Jeremiah's promise (Jer. 31:31–34) of a “new covenant.” Israel has failed to recognize the temporary nature of the old covenant and disregarded God's new work in Christ (2 Cor. 3:10–11). Thus, Israel still has the veil over its heart, but it is removed in Christ (3:13–14). In a brilliant show of rhetorical skill, Paul claims that the Corinthians, not the “recommended” opponents, show the glory of the new covenant (3:18).

Paul then reframes the Corinthians' perception of authority and leadership by contrasting the indescribable glory of Christ with the utter weakness of humanity. The might of the Holy Spirit, which empowers Paul's ministry, is held in “jars of clay,” a euphemism for the body (4:7). This highlights the surpassing greatness of Christ's glory, which is revealed not in pomp and ceremony, but in persecution and death. He reveals his eschatological perspective: “We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (4:18).

The mature Christian church should cultivate the discernment required to view people with different eyes, to look for transformed men and women in whom the Spirit is at work (5:17). Paul describes his role in helping the Corinthians understand this as his “ministry of reconciliation” (5:18), with himself as “Christ's ambassador” (5:20).

Paul's Collection for Judea (8:1–9:15)

At the end of chapter 7, Paul declares “complete confidence” in the Corinthians (7:16). With his accolades ringing in their ears, Paul now challenges the Corinthians to preserve his confidence in them by following through with their contribution to the Judean famine relief fund. He promotes material self-emptying—generosity—as an indication that the Corinthians are genuine in their love (8:8). He raises this issue because his opponents have provoked questions in the Corinthians’ minds as to the legitimacy of this collection (8:20–21).

Paul also capitalizes on Corinth’s relationship with its neighbours. Corinth’s historic rival was Macedonia, and he excites the Corinthians’ competitive nature by noting that the Macedonians have already been generous (8:1–2). The famine relief collection is Paul’s special project, and he writes about it extensively with his churches in Galatia (Gal. 2:9–10), Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1–2), and Corinth (1 Cor. 16:1); he also refers to it in Romans 15:25–32. Paul is concerned about the plight of his fellow Jews in Judea. But the famine gift also represents key theological concerns. Paul describes it with words like *eulogia* (“blessing,” 2 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 3:14), *charis* (“grace,” 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:6), and *koinōnia* (“sharing,” Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4). For Paul, Gentiles’ giving to Jews concretely demonstrates unity between the two segments within the church.

PAUL’S CONFRONTATION (10:1–13:13)

Paul reserves his harshest language for the “super-apostles” (11:5; 12:11), who presented letters of recommendation (3:1) and turned the Corinthians away from Paul and his gospel. His anger is evident: “Such persons are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (11:13–14). Paul is planning another visit (12:14), where he will face his accusers and not spare them (13:2–3).

Aristotle spoke of the importance of rhetoric and oratory skill. Paul declares that his own power comes from God, not human speech.

How did these “super-apostles” gain a foothold in the Corinthian church? They initially accepted money as payment for ministry, which impressed the church. But the church was also awed by their eloquence and rhetorical skills. They bore letters of recommendation (3:1) and claimed

superior spiritual experiences (cf. 1 Cor. 12–14 for the church’s interest in spiritual gifts).

The super-apostles taunt Paul about his weak presence, his failure to accept financial support, and his lack of special powers (visions, signs, and miracles). Their first criticism reflects a common view that public speakers should look healthy. One’s message suffers if he looks “thin and pale” (Epictetus, Discourses 3.22.86–87). Paul objects to being judged by human standards of oratory skill. He insists that he “take[s] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (10:5). On his supposed lack of special powers, Paul asserts that he demonstrated “among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles” (12:12).

Paul follows this claim with a sarcastic comment that he did all this free of charge, but the Corinthians seem offended (12:13). The issue of financial support was an important one to the Corinthians and tied closely to accusations of weakness. To fully appreciate the situation, we must understand the Roman social system of patron/client relationship (*clientela*). When a benefactor gave a gift, the recipient (client) was obliged to offer thanks. With due praise given, the benefactor bestowed more gifts to the client, and so the cycle continued. If Paul refused a gift, it was a serious social error, and the church might feel slighted. Yet if Paul accepted a gift, he would give the impression that he was a client of the church or indebted to it. Thus, Paul insisted on working manually as a tentmaker, which was socially demeaning.

The relief fund for Jerusalem presents another problem. Will Paul use the collection to get their money indirectly without taking on the social obligations inherent in the patron/client system? Paul vigorously defends himself against such slander and promises he will have nothing to do with the collection or its delivery to Jerusalem (8:17–23).

AUTHOR AND DATE

Few scholars have argued against Pauline authorship for 2 Corinthians. The critical debate concerns the unity of the letter (see above). The date of writing is generally placed in fall of AD 56 (see the timeline of Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians, above). After Paul travelled to Macedonia from Ephesus (Acts 20:1), he wrote 2 Corinthians.





Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of

death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.



LISTEN TO THE MESSAGE

Listen and take notes from the Sunday morning message or listen online to the recorded sermon. You can also access summative notes on our website.

<http://www.kingstoncommunitychurch.com/recordings>

<http://www.kingstoncommunitychurch.com/latest-news>

MESSAGE NOTES



COMPLETE THE STUDY GUIDE

Take your time across the week to work through the following study guide questions. Be prayerful as you seek truth in and through the Word. Jot down any questions or additional observations you make so you can share them with your small group.

OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul's vulnerability and openness are stunning, especially in view of the fact that he writes to a church where many openly oppose him. After a brief salutation (1:1–2), Paul praises God for providing comfort (vv. 3–7). The great apostle freely shares moments when he has felt desperate and depressed (1:8–11).

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 1:4

Why be vulnerable?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

What really qualifies us to help others is hurting ourselves and being comforted by God.

DISCOVER TRUTH

Consider the life of the Apostle Paul. Where does his authority come from and where do we read about this in Scripture?

How does Paul describe God? (1:3)

Why is Paul thankful? (1:3-7 & 1:8-11)

What does Paul say was God’s purpose for him being under “the sentence of death”? (1:8-9)

WORD STUDY

How many times do these verses mention “comfort”?

What does this tell us about the emphasis of this section of 2 Corinthians?

According to this passage, suffering and affliction are inextricably linked to comfort. Explain how and why you think God ties these two realities together.

Cross Reference: Psalm 119:50

Rather than complain, Paul praises God for His mercies and comfort in the midst of affliction. How was he able to do this?

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

In your own words, explain what 2 Corinthians 1:5 means.

Why does this need to be central to our understanding and experience of suffering and comfort?

What did comfort in Christ produce in the Corinthians? (1:6)

APPLY TRUTH

When was a you were comforted by God and/or by others in the midst of your affliction? What was the situation? How were you comforted?

When you encounter difficulty, do you tend to reach out to others or turn inward?

EXTRA

Read Psalm 27. When David is despairing from circumstances and enemies, what helps him?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a listen to **Suffering Makes Us Depend on God: 2 Corinthians 1:8–9** by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/labs/suffering-makes-us-depend-on-god>

COMMENTARY

1:1–2 Paul founded the church in Corinth around AD 51 during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). After 18 months in Corinth, he departed the city to continue his missionary work. Paul planned to visit Corinth again via Macedonia (1 Cor 16:5–9; 2 Cor 1:16), but instead travelled straight from Ephesus to Corinth. This visit turned out to be a painful experience, so Paul departed and wrote a severe letter to the Corinthian church (2:1–5; 7:12). When Paul heard about the Corinthians' largely positive response to the letter (7:6–7), he wrote 2 Corinthians to commend the church, to prepare them for the collection for the Jerusalem poor (chs. 8–9), and to warn them of false apostles in their midst (chs. 10–13). But Paul is still experiencing great struggles with the Corinthian church; he addresses these issues throughout the letter. The events described in 2 Corinthians took place during Paul's third missionary journey, with him writing 2 Corinthians ca. AD 55–57 from Macedonia (2:13; 7:5; 9:2).

1:1 apostle Refers to Paul's role as a commissioned minister of the gospel.

1:1 through the will of God Paul emphasizes that his apostleship comes from God's authority and not his own. He repeats this theme throughout the letter as a defence of his apostolic authority (2 Cor 1:21; 2:17; 3:5–6; 10:8; 13:10). See 1 Cor 1:1.

1:1 Timothy Paul includes Timothy as a co-sender of this letter. The Corinthians knew Timothy because he accompanied Paul during his ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:1, 5). See note on Phil 1:1; note on 1 Tim 1:2.

1:1 church of God By referring to the Corinthian church this way, Paul emphasizes that the community belongs to God. This title also reinforces the claim that the Corinthian church, which belongs to God, sits under Paul's apostolic authority, which comes from God. See note on 1 Cor 1:2.

1:1 Achaia The southern region of Greece; Corinth was the capital.

1:3–11 Paul begins his letter with a benediction to God rather than his typical thanksgiving address (compare 1 Cor 1:4–9; Phil 1:3–11; 1 Thess 1:2–10). In this section, he discusses the comfort God provides during suffering. He begins by stating that his experience of comfort and suffering enables him to comfort others (2 Cor 1:4–6). He refers to a life-threatening affliction he experienced in Asia, identifying God's intervening deliverance as his reason for continued hope in trials (vv. 8–10).

1:3 Blessed Paul alludes to a Jewish expression of praise called the *barakhah*, the Hebrew word for “blessing” (Pss 66:20; 72:18; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). Paul praises God for His provision of comfort during hardship.

1:3 comfort The Greek word Paul uses here, *paraklêsis* (and the corresponding verb *parakaleô*), occurs 10 times in 2 Cor 1:3–7. It typically refers to

encouragement or consolation given to someone who is suffering or in mourning (Matt 5:4).

1:4 affliction Paul may have the difficulties of his ministry in mind; see 2 Cor 11:23–29.

1:5 sufferings of Christ Refers primarily to the events Jesus underwent from His arrest to His death (Matt 26–27; Mark 14–15; Luke 22–23; John 18–19). These may also include the persecutions He suffered from religious leaders (Luke 19:47; John 5:18; 7:19) as well as the sufferings of His followers (e.g., 2 Cor 4:8–12).

1:6 we are afflicted Certain opponents in Corinth may have assumed that Paul's sufferings delegitimized his apostleship, as they regarded suffering as a sign of weakness. Paul reminds the believers that his sufferings brought about the spread of the gospel by displaying God's power (4:7–9).

1:6 your comfort Paul responds to his opponents by demonstrating that his suffering ultimately benefits the Corinthians. See note on 2 Cor 1:3.

1:7 hope The Greek word used here, *elpis*, refers to a confident expectation of deliverance. It indicates a firm trust that God will fulfil His promises (Rom 4:13–25; see 2 Cor 5:5 and note). For Paul, the Holy Spirit provides an assurance of hope while undergoing suffering (Rom 8:18–30; see Gal 5:5 and note).

1:8–11 It's only human when attacked to defend by pointing to our strengths. Instead, Paul freely shares his weaknesses! It is amazing to see the apostle speak of being under pressure "beyond our ability to endure." Why does Paul take this tack? Paul knows that he cannot force others to respond to his authority. He must rely on God to cause a change of heart. Ministry which leads to a change of heart requires us to be open and utterly honest and rely wholly on God to do His transforming work.

1:8 province of Asia A Roman province located in modern Turkey. Paul is probably referring to his hardships in Ephesus here (Acts 19:23–41; 1 Cor 15:31–32).

1:9 sentence of death The severity of Paul's persecution leads him to claim that he felt like a judge had condemned him to die (Acts 14:19–20). He juxtaposes death and life throughout this letter (2 Cor 2:16; 4:7–14; 5:1–10; 13:4).

1:10 our hope Paul confidently expects God to deliver him from persecution. He recognizes that God's deliverance will not be for his own sake, but for the sake of believers and those who have not yet heard the gospel message (see Phil 1:21–26; 2 Tim 4:17).

1:11 Your prayers The “only human” response when others resist our authority is to try to prove we are so important that the others need us. Paul continues to model God’s approach to ministry by letting the Corinthians know that they are so important that he has a need for their prayers. How different spiritual leadership is from “only human” ways!



For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

2 Corinthians 1:20



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12 – 2:11

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹² For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. ¹³ For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand—¹⁴ just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

¹⁵ Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. ¹⁶ I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. ¹⁷ Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? ¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. ²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

²³ But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

2 ¹ For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. ² For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? ³ And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. ⁴ For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

⁵ Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. ⁶ For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, ⁷ so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. ¹⁰ Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, ¹¹ so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.



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MESSAGE NOTES



COMPLETE THE STUDY GUIDE

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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul carefully explains the reasons for a delay in making a planned visit to Corinth (1:12–2:4). One very positive consequence of Paul’s first letter to the church is the repentance of the brother there who was engaging in immorality (1 Cor. 5:1–8). The Corinthians had followed Paul’s instructions and put the sinner out of the fellowship. Now Paul urges them to show compassion and welcome him back (2:5–11).

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 1:20

God’s promises are true, trustworthy, and fulfilled in Christ.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

It is important for us to communicate our motives and reasons for the actions we take.

DISCOVER TRUTH

What was Pauls behaviour like among the Corinthians? (1:12)

In what Paul says, we can gain an understanding of some of the accusations his critics were throwing at him. What were they possibly saying about him? (1:12-13)

Normally we think of boasting as being sinful. What does Paul boast in, and why is it ok? (1:12; 14)

What does Paul say about his words? (1:17-18)

What does Paul say about the teachings of Christ? (1:19-20)

WORD STUDY

What does it show by having the Holy Spirit as the seal placed upon us? (1:22)

What is 'guaranteed'? (1:22)

Cross Reference: 1 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; Romans 8:11

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

Paul planned to see the Corinthians but was unable to. Even though his plans changed, what does he point the Corinthians to that never changes? (1:15-2:4)

How are the plans and promises of God fulfilled in Jesus?

Cross Reference: Ephesians 1:3-14

APPLY TRUTH

Paul warns that a failure to forgive opens the door for Satan's plans. What can Satan accomplish through a believer/church that fails to forgive?

What is your tendency when hurt? Confront or not confront? Forgive or withhold forgiveness? Explain.

EXTRA

What is the purpose of biblical discipline?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a listen or read to **Faith for the Future** a devotional by John Piper
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/faith-for-the-future>

COMMENTARY

1:12–14 After his opening greeting (2 Cor 1:1–2) and benediction (vv. 3–11), Paul begins to defend himself against the criticisms he faces. In this passage, he makes a general defence of his integrity and ministry.

1:12 boasting See 1 Cor 1:29.

1:12 holiness and purity of motive Paul sought to maintain integrity in ministry to prevent the gospel from losing credibility. He was especially sensitive to the issue of financial support in the regions of Macedonia and Achaia; he did not want others to perceive him as a peddler or ordinary philosopher (2 Cor 2:17; 1 Cor 9:1–12; Phil 4:14–17; 1 Thess 2:9).

1:12 merely human wisdom See 1 Cor 1:24.

1:13 anything else to you except what you can read The opponents in Corinth accused Paul of being insincere and deceitful (2 Cor 10:10), but Paul affirms that

he made his intentions and expectations clear in this letter. This gave the Corinthian believers no excuse for disobedience or misunderstanding.

1:14 day of our Lord Jesus Refers to the OT expression “Day of Yahweh” (Isa 13:9; Joel 1:15; Mal 4:5). The NT writers equated this day with the day of Christ—the time when Christ returns to judge the wicked and deliver His people (see 1 Thess 5:2).

1:15–2:4 Paul moves from a general defence of his ministry and integrity (2 Cor 1:12–14) to a specific defence of why he did not visit the Corinthians as he had planned (1 Cor 16:5–7). Paul’s failure to visit Corinth apparently led some Corinthians to view him as unreliable (see 2 Cor 1:17 and note). After a brief statement about God’s faithfulness (vv. 18–22), Paul explains that he did not visit in order to spare them and give them an opportunity to repent (see v. 23 and note). Instead of returning to Corinth in sorrow, Paul wrote them a letter (2:1–4).

1:15 to come to you previously Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his plans to visit them (1 Cor 16:5–7). When he did not arrive, some people questioned his commitment and integrity (2 Cor 1:17; Matt 5:37).

1:15 a second proof This probably indicates that Paul intended to visit Corinth twice: once on his way to Macedonia and then again on his way back to Judaea.

1:16 Macedonia The Roman province north of Corinth, also located in modern Greece. Paul founded churches in the Macedonian cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

1:17 my “no” may be “no” Some Corinthian believers accused Paul of being indecisive or inconsistent about his return to Corinth (compare 2 Cor 1:15, 17), when in fact he chose not to visit because he did not want to cause them grief (1:22–2:4). Instead he wrote them a painful letter so they would repent (7:8–9).

1:18 God is faithful Paul may be using an oath formula similar to the expression “as surely as God lives ...” (see Job 27:2 and note). If so, he uses it to stress that his words are true (compare 2 Cor 1:23).

1:18 our word Refers to Paul’s communication to the Corinthians—the gospel message as well as his travel plans (1 Cor 1:23; 16:5–7).

1:19 Silvanus and Timothy Two missionary companions who ministered with Paul in Corinth (see Acts 18:5–6). Paul includes both Silvanus—referred to as Silas in Acts (e.g., Acts 15:22)—and Timothy as co-senders of the letters to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1).

1:19 yes” and “no Describes contradictory messages. Paul affirms that his message was consistent with the teaching of Christ.

1:20 promises of God Refers to all of God’s promises in the OT. Paul also mentions God’s promises in 2 Cor 7:1, where he cites a series of OT quotations that highlight God’s adoption of His people (see 6:16–18 and notes). Elsewhere Paul refers to God’s promise to Abraham (see Rom 4:13 and note).

1:20 in him they are “yes” Indicates that God’s promises are true, trustworthy, and fulfilled in Christ.

1:21 who anoints Refers to an OT custom of marking a person for service to God.

1:22 sealed Signifies ownership. Paul writes elsewhere that God gave believers the Spirit as proof they belong to Him (see Eph 1:13).

1:22 down payment of the Spirit The Holy Spirit is a down payment of the believer’s inheritance in the kingdom of God (see Eph 1:13–14; 2 Cor 5:5).

1:23 to spare you Paul previously corrected the Corinthian believers on a number of issues (1 Cor 3:21; 5:1; 6:1). Paul probably chose to delay his visit because he wanted to give the Corinthians the opportunity to repent and prove their obedience. He may have also wanted to avoid taking disciplinary measures—which would cause discouragement—against them.

1:24 lord it over your faith Paul does not control the Corinthians’ faith, nor does he function as a mediator between them and God. The Corinthian believers must take responsibility for their faith and their relationship with God.

2:1 not to come to you again in sorrow Compare 2 Cor 1:23 and 7:8–9.

2:3 I wrote While Paul may be referring to 1 Corinthians here, he is probably referring to another letter written between 1 and 2 Corinthians. It is also possible that he is referring specifically to chs. 10–13, a section that corresponds to Paul’s “distressed” and “anguished” description (v. 4; see note on 10:1–18).

2:4 you may know the love Paul emphasizes that he did not write the painful letter to hurt the Corinthian church; rather, he wrote out of love to rebuke the Corinthians toward repentance (7:8–12). He also explains that writing the letter caused him “distress and anguish.”

2:5–11 Apparently the Corinthians responded to Paul’s letter (see note on v. 3) by disciplining the person most responsible for Paul’s rebuke. Here, Paul encourages them to forgive and comfort the offender (vv. 7–8).

2:5 if anyone has caused sorrow Paul may be referring to the incestuous person described in 1 Cor 5:1–5. He more likely refers, however, to the person who was the focus of Paul’s rebuke in the painful letter (see note on 2 Cor 2:3).

2:6 punishment The Corinthian church previously punished the person Paul rebuked in his “tearful letter.” It is unclear what kind of punishment the church carried out; it may have been a public rebuke or expulsion from the church community. Elsewhere, Paul advises believers to expel an offender so that the offender might repent (see note on 1 Cor 5:13). Whatever the individual’s punishment, Paul describes it as “sufficient.”

2:7 rather forgive Since the punishment was sufficient, Paul encourages the Corinthians to forgive the offender and restore him back into the community.

2:7 and comfort him See note on 2 Cor 1:3.

2:8 I urge you The Greek word Paul uses here is *parakaleō* (see note on 1:3).

2:8 Confirm The Greek word used here, *kyroō*, is a legal term meaning “to affirm” or “to ratify” (see Gal 3:15 and note). In forgiving the offender, the Corinthian church will validate their love (*agapē* in Greek) as a community.

2:9 I could know your proven character Paul reveals another reason for writing his painful letter (2 Cor 2:3–4): He wanted to see if they would obey him and discipline the individual requiring rebuke. In disciplining the offender, the Corinthian church demonstrated respect for Paul’s apostolic authority.

2:10 I also do In case the Corinthian church was worried that they would offend Paul by forgiving the one who offended him, Paul assures them that they will not. Anyone they forgive, Paul also forgives.

2:11 Satan The Corinthians’ forgiveness of the individual will restore unity in the church and ensure that Satan cannot take advantage of any division. Paul mentions Satan’s activity several times in the Corinthian letters (1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor 4:4; 6:15; 11:14; 12:7).



Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Corinthians 3:4-6



READ SCRIPTURE

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2 CORINTHIANS 2:12 – 3:6

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¹² When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, ¹³ my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

3 ¹ Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? ² You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. ³ And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.



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MESSAGE NOTES



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

With continuing humility Paul expresses again his own sense of personal inadequacy, for he is the agent of a Gospel with life and death impact (vv. 12–16). How could Paul trivialize such a Gospel by peddling God’s Word for profit, or failing to be utterly honest and sincere? (v. 17) Paul now introduces the concept which is foundational to his whole concept of ministry: the “New Covenant.” Paul needs no letters of recommendation to demonstrate his apostolic call. The transformation God has worked within the Corinthians themselves makes them living letters, proof of the new covenant quality of Paul’s service (3:1–6).

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 3:4

The Spirit’s transforming work and indwelling presence among the Corinthians function as a recommendation from Christ.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Every true believer is an “open letter” from Christ, because his or her life will show God’s work within his or her personality.

DISCOVER TRUTH

Over what kind of things is Christ triumphant? (2:14)

What does Paul mean when he says that God “spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere”? (2:14-17)

What is the relationship between Paul’s view of preaching the gospel and Paul’s sincere character? (2:17)

WORD STUDY

Make a list of all of God’s actions in this verse compared to our actions.

GOD’S ACTIONS

OUR ACTIONS

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

How did the Corinthian church serve as a letter of recommendation for Paul?

APPLY TRUTH

When Paul contrasts the letter and the Spirit (3:6), he isn't favouring "experience" over "the word." Instead, he is showing the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant. How is the new covenant superior to the old covenant and how does this benefit us as believers?

How should we act, knowing we are an advertisement for Christianity?
(3:2-3)

EXTRA

Often, we wait to minister to others because we don't feel ready or worthy. How can Paul saying his sufficiency is in Christ rather than in himself help us when we don't feel "ready" or competent to be ministers of the gospel?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God's attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Consider this **Prayer for Releasing the Fragrance of Christ and the Aroma of Grace** by Scotty Smith

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/scotty-smith/a-prayer-for-releasing-the-fragrance-of-christ-and-the-aroma-of-grace/>

COMMENTARY

2:12–13 Paul resumes the explanation of why he did not visit Corinth as he had previously planned (see 1:15–2:4 and note). These verses also lead into the defence of his apostolic ministry (2:14–7:4) by highlighting the reason for his travel for the gospel of Christ and God’s active intervention in Paul’s life.

2:12 Troas A city located on the coast of the Aegean Sea in modern Turkey. While Paul was in Troas, he received a vision and concluded that he should preach the gospel in Macedonia (Acts 16:8–10).

2:12 by the Lord Paul defends his change of travel plans by emphasizing God’s active intervention in his life. This in turn contributes to Paul’s defence of his ministry (see 2 Cor 2:14 and note).

2:13 did not experience rest Paul considered this unrest as part of his suffering on behalf of believers (11:28).

2:13 Titus A Gentile missionary companion of the Apostle Paul (Gal 2:1, 3; 2 Tim 4:10). Paul sent Titus to Corinth with his earlier distressed letter (2 Cor 2:3–4; 7:13–15; 12:18) and again with 2 Corinthians (8:16–17). See Titus 1:4.

2:13 Macedonia Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (Acts 20:1–2). See note on 2 Cor 1:16.

2:14–17 Paul here begins a defence of his apostolic ministry that makes up much of his letter (2:14–7:4). He gives thanks to God for leading him in victory (v. 14). He also defends his motives as pure and describes himself as speaking before God (v. 17).

2:14 leads us in triumphal procession May refer to a procession in which the ark of the covenant would be brought into Jerusalem (e.g., Psa 68), but most likely refers to a Roman victory parade. Despite his suffering, Paul is confident in his victory through Christ (see note on 2 Cor 1:7).

2:15 aroma of Christ May allude to a Roman victory parade, in which people burned incense and presented spices along the route. Alternatively, Paul could be thinking of aromas associated with sacrifices (e.g., Phil 4:18; Eph 5:12).

2:15 being saved and among those who are perishing The Corinthians categorized people according to their status and wealth (see 1 Cor 1:26). Paul

ignores these categories and asserts that there are only two. See 1 Cor 1:18 and note.

2:16 who is qualified Paul later answers this question by showing that his sufficiency comes from God (see 2 Cor 3:5 and note).

2:17 who peddle the word of God In contrast to the false apostles mentioned in 11:1–14, Paul did not accept any payment from the Corinthian church (11:7, 9; 12:13–16).

2:17 pure motives See note on 1:12.

3:1–18 Continuing the defense of his apostolic ministry, Paul states that he doesn't need letters of recommendation to validate his ministry (vv. 1–3); rather, God validates his ministry (vv. 4–6). Paul then transitions into a discussion of the new covenant aspect of his ministry, comparing Moses' ministry of the law (or old covenant) with his ministry of the new covenant (vv. 7–18).

3:1 beginning to commend ourselves again In 2:17, Paul reminded the Corinthians about the sincerity of his ministry. He does not, however, want them to misinterpret this reminder as self-commendation—boasting about his achievements to impress others and establish credibility. The Corinthians may have accused Paul of doing so since he addresses this issue throughout the letter (4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12, 18; 12:11). He claims that only false apostles engage in such self-commendation (11:2–3).

3:1 letters of recommendation In Paul's time, itinerant ministers used letters of recommendation to establish their legitimacy and authority. The apostles of Jerusalem sent Paul and Barnabas to Antioch with a letter of recommendation (Acts 15:22–31). Paul includes a letter of recommendation for Titus and two other unnamed men who deliver this letter to the Corinthian church (see note on 2 Cor 8:16–24).

3:2 You are our letter The Corinthians should realize their existence as a church is the result of Paul's apostolic ministry. In this sense, they serve as Paul's letter of recommendation, testifying to the legitimacy of his apostleship (compare 1 Cor 9:1–2).

3:3 letter of Christ The Spirit's transforming work and indwelling presence among the Corinthians function as a recommendation from Christ. See note on 2 Cor 3:1.

3:3 tablets of human hearts Paul contrasts the stone tablets, a reference to the law of Moses (Exod 24:12), with the new covenant promised by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer 31:33; Ezek 11:20). Christ did away with the old covenant of the law (2 Cor 3:14) and brought in the new covenant with freedom (vv. 15–18). The coming of the Spirit is evidence of this new covenant and legitimizes Paul as a minister of the new covenant.

3:5 our adequacy is from God Paul answers a question he asked in 2:16. He points to God as the source of his qualifications; his confidence (v. 4) does not come from his own abilities, but from the power of God (1 Cor 2:1–5).

3:6 of a new covenant See note on 2 Cor 3:3.

3:6 the letter kills This is a reference to the law of Moses (compare Rom 2:27; 7:6). The law does not justify people; it only identifies sin and condemns (see Rom 3:20; 8:2). Instead, people are justified by faith (see Rom 3:28).



And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18



READ SCRIPTURE

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2 CORINTHIANS 3:7-18

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⁷ Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. ¹⁰ Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it.

¹¹ For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

¹² Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.



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MESSAGE NOTES



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul contrasts new and old covenant ministry (vv. 7–18). The old covenant administered by Moses offered no inner transformation. This is illustrated by Moses himself, for after leaving God’s presence he put a veil over his face so the people would not see the splendour, which God’s presence had imparted, fade away. In contrast, because God’s Spirit now lives within the believer a process of transformation is taking place. That transformation, marked by increasingly clear reflection through the believer’s life of the splendour of Christ Himself, is the mark of New Covenant ministry.

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 3:18

The process is taking place.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Be open and let others see what God is doing to transform you.

DISCOVER TRUTH

Paul contrasts the old Testament with the New testament. (3:3-16) List the contrast side by side.

OLD TESTAMENT

NEW TESTAMENT

How does Paul describe those who still hold to the law which is passing away? (3:14-16)

The Old Testament actually points people to Christ (Cf: John 5:39-47). Why could these people not see it? (3:14-16)

WORD STUDY

What is glory? How would you define and explain it?

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

How is there 'freedom' where the Spirit of the Lord is?

How is Jesus' glory transferred to us? (3:18)

APPLY TRUTH

According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, how do we grow to be more like Jesus?

EXTRA

In your own words, how would you describe what it means to “turn to the Lord” as quoted in 2 Corinthians 3:16?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a listen to **How Can I Change? 2 Corinthians 3:15–18** by John Piper
<https://www.desiringgod.org/labs/how-can-i-change>

COMMENTARY

3:7 ministry of death Paul contrasts his ministry with the ministry of Moses. The law, as given by Moses, only brings death and condemnation (compare note on 2 Cor 3:6). In contrast to God's Spirit, the law was not capable of giving life (Rom 8:3; Gal 3:21).

3:7 glory The Greek word used here, *doxa*, refers to the splendour of God's manifest presence.

3:7 face of Moses Even though Moses' ministry of the law was a ministry of death and condemnation, it was still accompanied by the glory of God. While God's glory made Moses' face radiant (Exod 34:29–35), that glory did not last.

3:8 ministry of the Spirit Refers to the ministry that imparts the Holy Spirit (pneuma in Greek) and stands in contrast to the ministry of death described in 2 Cor 3:7. The glory of this ministry is greater and longer lasting because of the Spirit's presence within the believer (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).

3:9 ministry of righteousness This ministry provides right standing before God. It not only removes the guilt of sin, it also empowers the believer to do what is right (compare 2 Cor 3:7 and note).

3:9 overflow with glory If the old covenant, which was characterized by death and condemnation, came with glory (see v. 7 and note), how much more does the new covenant, which is characterized by the Spirit and righteousness, reveal God's glory?

3:10 had been glorified Refers to the law of Moses or the old covenant (Exod 34:29). Although God's splendour shone on the face of Moses, it cannot compare to the splendour of the new covenant. The glory of the new covenant exceeds the glory of the old covenant.

3:12 boldness Paul bases the boldness of his apostolic ministry in the permanence of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:11) and the hope it provides in the resurrection of Jesus (4:13–18).

3:13 place a veil over his face Refers to Exodus 34:33–35. The veil covered the radiance of the glory, but it also concealed its fading quality. The transitory nature of the glory corresponds to the transitory nature of the old covenant.

3:14 minds were hardened Represents God's judgment. He hardens the minds and hearts of those who suppress His truth and revelation (Exod 32:9; 33:3; 34:9; compare Rom 1:28).

3:14 until this very day Many Israelites rejected God's word in the law and the prophets (e.g., Isa 6:9–10; Jer 5:21–24; compare Rom 11:7–8, 25). Paul encountered opposition from Jews who denied the gospel message as the

fulfilment of the old covenant. He concluded that their hearts were hardened (see Acts 28:26–27; Rom 15:21).

3:14 reading of the old covenant Jews typically heard the Law read every week in the local synagogue (see Luke 4:16–17; Acts 13:27; 15:21; 17:2–3).

3:15 Moses is read aloud Refers to the law that God gave to Moses (Exod 24:12).

3:15 a veil Moses covered his face with a veil because of the radiance of God’s glory (Exod 34:33–34). This veil represents the Jews’ hardened hearts and their inability to grasp the gospel message and refusal to obey God.

3:16 one turns to the Lord Refers to conversion and the reception of the Spirit.

3:16 veil is removed Signifies that nothing stands between believers and God. Through Christ, God has reconciled the world to Himself, bringing freedom and forgiveness (2 Cor 5:18–21).

3:17 the Lord is the Spirit Paul may be identifying Christ with the Spirit—particularly in terms of their roles—while also distinguishing between them. Jesus and the Spirit are elsewhere identified with each other (e.g., Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:10–11). It also is possible that 2 Cor 3:17 clarifies v. 16, where “the Lord” refers to God the Father. In this case, Paul’s point is that the Lord of the OT narrative mentioned in v. 16 (Exod 34:34) is the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:3, 6, 8). Either way, the Spirit’s role in lifting the veil is central to Paul’s message.

3:17 freedom The ministry of the Spirit (v. 8) brings freedom from the power of sin and death—those things that the law could not free people from. See v. 6 and note.

3:18 unveiled face Represents freedom and confidence to enjoy God’s presence.

3:18 the same image Refers to the image of Christ that believers bear (Col 3:10; compare Gen 1:26–27).

3:18 from glory into glory Paul suggests that believers will progress through ever-greater degrees of glory (*doxa* in Greek). This may mean that they will learn and grow more in their relationship with Him over time. Alternatively, this progress may begin with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and culminate in the transformation of the physical body into a glorious one (1 Cor 15:50–54).

3:18 the Spirit See 2 Cor 3:17.



But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

2 Corinthians 4:7



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-15

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹ Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you. ¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you

into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.



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MESSAGE NOTES



COMPLETE THE STUDY GUIDE

Take your time across the week to work through the following study guide questions. Be prayerful as you seek truth in and through the Word. Jot down any questions or additional observations you make so you can share them with your small group.

OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

God's New Covenant infuses the Gospel with dynamic, transforming power (2 Cor. 3). Therefore, Paul neither loses heart nor relies on anything other than light shed by the Gospel message itself (4:1–6). Although he feels himself little more than a clay vessel, weak and vulnerable, that vessel bears God's greatest treasure (vv. 7–12). Whatever the difficulties, whatever the setbacks, whatever the troubles experienced in ministry, Paul believes. Knowing God in Christ, he is confident in not only his own eternal destiny but also the destiny of the Corinthian believers (vv. 13–15)

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 4:7

His, not ours.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Circumstances change. God does not.

DISCOVER TRUTH

What caused Paul not to lose heart but instead to persevere? How did he have the strength to do it? (4:1-2)

Cross Reference: 2 Corinthians 3

How would you explain to someone what “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” is?

What is Paul’s (and our) responsibility in ministry to unbelievers? What is God’s responsibility? (4:3-6)

Our responsibility

God’s responsibility

WORD STUDY

Paul uses an analogue of a “veil” a number of different times. In the following verses, who placed the veil and what was it hiding?

Who placed the veil? What was it hiding?

2 Corinthians 3:13

2 Corinthians 3:14-15

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

What is the significance of Christ being the image of God?

Identify and explain each of the paradoxes Paul emphasises about his ministry (4:8-12)

2 Corinthians 4:8a

2 Corinthians 4:8b

2 Corinthians 4:9a

2 Corinthians 4:9b

2 Corinthians 4:10

2 Corinthians 4:11

2 Corinthians 4:12

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

How does the frailty of humanity emphasise and highlight the power of God? (4:7)

Paul quotes from Psalm 116:10 (4:13). Read Psalm 11. How does this relate to what Paul is saying?

APPLY TRUTH

What hardships are you currently facing and how can Jesus shine more brightly in you through them?

Paul says that his ultimate purpose for ministering to the Corinthians is to bring more glory to God (4:15). How does that glory of God impact the way you live?

EXTRA

Why is being a servant to others essential for sharing the gospel? (4:5)

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a listen to **When It Appears the Gospel Isn’t Working** by Mike Cain <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/word-of-the-week/appears-gospel-isnt-working/>

COMMENTARY

4:1–6 Paul continues the defence of his ministry (2:17–7:4). In the previous section, Paul focused on the glory of the new covenant—especially when compared to the old covenant (3:7–18). Here, he claims he has openly proclaimed God’s truth (vv. 1–2) and explains that if his message is hidden, it is because Satan has blinded unbelievers (vv. 3–4). Paul affirms that he is not promoting himself but proclaiming Christ Jesus as Lord (v. 5).

4:1 this ministry Refers to the ministry of the Spirit and the ministry of righteousness referenced in 3:8–9.

4:1 we do not lose heart Despite his hardships and opposition (11:23–29), Paul remains encouraged in his proclamation of the message of reconciliation (5:18). He did not lose heart because God had already won victory (see 2:14 and note) through the resurrection of Jesus (vv. 13–18).

4:2 adulterating the word of God Paul continues to contrast himself with itinerant teachers who preached the Word only for financial gain (2:17; see note on 1:12; compare 1 Tim 6:5) and distorted God’s Word (see 2 Cor 11:4 and note).

4:3 veiled Paul acknowledges that some did not accept the gospel message—not because he obscured or hid anything from them (see 3:12–14), but because they were blinded by the work of evil forces and false teachers (see v. 4). See note on 3:15.

4:4 the god of this age Refers to Satan (compare John 12:31; 14:30; Eph 2:2). Satan further blinds those who refuse to obey the gospel.

4:4 image of God Jesus is described as the image of God here and in Col 1:15. Elsewhere, Paul teaches that believers are to conform to the image of Christ just as Christ bears the image of God (Rom 8:29). Compare Phil 2:6.

4:5 do not proclaim ourselves Paul and his companions focused their message on Christ’s divine nature as Lord. Paul’s remark suggests that some “false apostles” were presenting themselves as important rather than as servants (2 Cor 11:13).

4:6 Light will shine out of darkness Paul alludes to the creation account (see Gen 1:3). Just as God created the world, He now makes believers a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

4:7–15 Having extolled the glory of the new covenant, which he preached (2 Cor 3:7–4:6), Paul now explains his suffering (see 1:6 and note). While believers share in the knowledge of the glory of God (v. 6) and are being transformed into the image of

Christ (3:18), they do so in their frail, mortal bodies. Because of this, Paul suffers and faces hardship, but he perseveres (vv. 8–10). He regards this as part of his ministry, since such hardships benefit the church in Corinth (vv. 11–12). Moreover, believers can endure suffering because of the hope provided by the resurrection of Jesus (vv. 14–15).

4:7 this treasure Refers to the knowledge of God’s glory (v. 6) and may include the proclamation of this knowledge to the world.

4:7 earthenware jars Represents human frailty (Psa 31:12; Isa 30:14). Paul acknowledges God’s power and mercy, which enable him to possess and proclaim the gospel.

4:8 afflicted in every way See note on 1:6.

4:10 death of Jesus Represents the life-threatening situations Paul experienced because of his ministry (Acts 9:16; 14:22; 21:10–14). Paul’s sufferings not only display God’s power (2 Cor 4:7), but also bear witness to the death of Jesus and His resurrected life. This phrase also may include the sufferings of Christ as part of the content of Paul’s gospel message.

4:11 the life of Jesus Refers to the resurrected life of Christ. This promise of life is the source of power and the motivation for Paul to endure hardship. Since he lives in union with Christ, he trusts that God will raise him (2 Tim 2:11).

4:11 our mortal flesh Refers to the body.

4:12 but life in you Paul faced opposition when he ministered in Corinth (Acts 18:6), but the Spirit encouraged him to stay and not be afraid (Acts 18:9–10). Consequently, many Corinthians heard the gospel message and accepted it.

4:13 I believed, therefore I spoke Paul quotes Psalm 116:10. Just like the psalmist, his faith enables him to proclaim God’s Word.

4:14 raised Jesus will also raise us The resurrection of the dead is Paul’s hope and motivation for enduring hardship. See 1:9.

4:15 for your sake Refers to the sufferings mentioned in vv. 8–11. Paul reminds the Corinthians of his servant nature in apostolic ministry, thus presenting them with an example for proper behaviour (see 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1).



*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away,
our inner self is being renewed day by day.*

2 Corinthians 4:16



READ SCRIPTURE

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2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-5:10

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

5 ¹ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.



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MESSAGE NOTES



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

With his eyes fixed on eternal truths which can be experienced but not seen, rather than on the temporary setbacks and momentary troubles that mark life on earth, Paul simply does not—he will not—lose heart (vv. 16–18).

Life itself is among those “temporary” things which man can see (4:18). But the Gospel promises that beyond this life, eternal life awaits. The Spirit, whose transforming work we experience (3:18), is the down payment who guarantees our eventual deliverance (5:1–5). This gives Paul such confidence that he concentrates completely on pleasing God, sure that the quality of each person’s work will be recognized at Christ’s “judgment seat” (vv. 6–10; see illustration, 2 Corinthians).

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 4:16

Do not lose heart because God had already won victory through the resurrection of Jesus

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Suffering is temporary and will give way to an eternal glory

DISCOVER TRUTH

What are the processes of destruction and renewal which are going on at the same time? (4:16-18)

What was Paul's secret of endurance? (4:16-18)

2 Corinthians 4:16

2 Corinthians 4:17

2 Corinthians 4:18

On what does Paul base his knowledge of an eternal home in heaven?
(5:1)

Cross Reference: 2 Corinthians 5:1; 2 Corinthians 4:7, 13-14

WORD STUDY

How is it possible to see things that are unseen? (4:18)

Cross Reference: 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:27

What is this “tent” which he mentions? (5:1)

What is this “heavenly dwelling” we are to put on? (5:3)

What does death bring us? (5:4)

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

Why is the Spirit given to us? (5:5)

What gives us confidence? (5:6-7)

What two reasons motivate us to live “please” God at all times? (5:9-10)

APPLY TRUTH

We are told to be of good courage twice in this passage. What are the truths in this passage that can give us courage?

What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight?

What aspects of your life are guided by your senses rather than by your faith?

EXTRA

What motivates you the most in your Christian walk? Explain.

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

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<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/serve-god-with-your-thirst>

COMMENTARY

4:16 we do not lose heart See 2 Cor 4:1.

4:16 renewed day after day Believers should continue to grow in the knowledge of God and be transformed into Christ's image in preparation for His return (see Phil 1:6); the Holy Spirit does this work in believers.

4:17 momentary light affliction Hardships are temporary and easier to bear when put in the perspective of eternity. Such hardships do not merit glory; rather, God uses them to display His strength in weakness.

4:18 not looking at what is seen Paul does not focus on his afflictions. Instead, he reflects on God's promises and the hope of resurrection in Christ (2 Cor 1:20; 4:14).

5:1–10 Having just discussed human frailty (4:7), Paul talks about believers' future hope of an eternal heavenly dwelling. He contrasts the earthly house—which groans and is burdened—with the heavenly dwelling with the Lord. Paul notes that the Holy Spirit acts as a down payment of this future hope (v. 5; compare 1:22 and note).

5:1 earthly house, the tent The body, which is susceptible to death and decay (compare 4:7).

5:1 destroyed Refers to death.

5:1 house not made by hands, eternal Either refers to the resurrected body believers receive when Christ returns (1 Cor 15:50–54), the corporate body of Christ, the new Jerusalem, or the temple in the city (Rev 21:10, 22).

5:2 dwelling from heaven See 2 Cor 5:1.

5:4 but to be clothed Paul describes this transformation in 1 Cor 15:50–54.

5:4 life Refers to eternal life. See Rom 2:7.

5:5 the down payment, the Spirit God provides believers with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that they will receive resurrected spiritual bodies when Christ returns (see 2 Cor 1:22; compare Eph 1:14).

5:6 in the body Refers to life in the physical human body, not the Church as the body of Christ.

5:6 absent The Greek word used here, *ekdidōmi*, often translated as “absent” or “away,” can also mean “exiled.” Paul may be drawing on the background of Isa 40–55, where God promises to restore His exiled people (see 2 Cor 1:3).

5:7 by faith, not by sight Believers have not seen proof of resurrection and glorification with their own eyes. Paul encourages them to live by faith and to confidently expect God to do what He promised in Christ (compare 1 Pet 1:18). See Heb 11:1.

5:8 absent from the body Likely alludes to an intermediate period between a believer’s death and the final resurrection of all people (compare Rev 20:11–15). When believers die, they leave the physical body and enter the presence of Christ (compare Phil 1:23; 1 Thess 4:13–18).

5:9 be acceptable to him Paul and his companions oriented their lives to please God in every way. He encourages the Corinthian believers to regard time on earth as profitable.

5:10 we must all appear God will judge all individuals—including believers—not only in terms of salvation, but also with respect to eternal rewards for deeds performed while on earth (Rom 2:6–10; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 11:15).

5:10 judgment seat When Paul was in Corinth, he was brought before the judgment seat by Jews who opposed him (see Acts 18:12). In Romans, Paul uses the judgment seat of God to show that believers should not judge others (see Rom 14:10). Here, Paul uses it to encourage the Corinthian believers to live lives that are acceptable or pleasing to God (2 Cor 5:9).



Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:17



READ SCRIPTURE

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2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-6:2

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 ¹ Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says,

“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul, sure that the unseen is real, relies on the love for Christ that God plants in the believer's heart on conversion. He does not become discouraged by others' slow spiritual progress, convinced that Christ died to so change believers that they will live for Him rather than for themselves (vv. 11–15). Paul thus will not measure anyone by his or her behavior, as the world evaluates. He will count on the unseen work of God that makes believers new creations. And Paul, as God's ambassador, will continue to do his own reconciling work as our Lord did His: by appealing, not by counting the Corinthians many sins and not by holding those sins against them (vv. 16–20). God dealt with our sins in Christ in order to make us righteous. Christ's sacrifice was not in vain, and God's work will not fail! (v. 21)

Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 6 belong with chapter 5. God's grace has made believers new creations, with the potential to live truly righteous lives. That wonderful day when human beings can at last experience such a salvation is now. How tragic if the Corinthians' hardness made such grace of no practical, transforming value to them at all (6:1–2).

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 5:17

We are not what we seem.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Follow Paul's example. Don't be discouraged. Just love the immature to spiritual maturity.

DISCOVER TRUTH

What motivated and controlled Paul to speak? (5:11-15)

2 Corinthians 5:11

2 Corinthians 5:12

2 Corinthians 5:13

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

What does the Gospel announce to us about God and His Son?

2 Corinthians 5:15

2 Corinthians 5:18

2 Corinthians 5:21

WORD STUDY

What is meant by “reconciliation”? (5:18-20)

How have we as humans been reconciled to God?

What did God do so that reconciliation could take place?

Why does Paul “implore” them to “be reconciled to God” if they are already Christians? (5:20)

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

How can the love of Christ overcome a person’s self-serving attitude?
(5:14-15)

How radical is the change we undergo? (5:17)

Is it possible to frustrate God’s grace? Explain.

APPLY TRUTH

What is one way God is calling you to die to self and live for Him right now?

Cross Reference: Colossians 3:15-17

What has your experience of God's grace been?

EXTRA

2 Corinthians is one of the clearest statements in the Bible of the doctrine of “substitutionary atonement”. This doctrine means that Jesus bore the penalty for our sins and took our place, so we don't have to die for our own sins.

In what sense did Jesus “become sin” on our behalf?

In what sense do we “become righteousness”?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a listen to **3 Minute Theology 3.2: What is the Substitutionary Atonement?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIW8lFawfP8>

COMMENTARY

5:11–21 Paul explains the purpose of his ministry: reconciliation. He first notes that he is not commending himself; instead, he is being controlled by the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:12–14). Paul emphasizes that Christ’s death was for all people (vv. 15–17). Through Christ, God provided reconciliation for all people, making all those who are in Christ a new creation. Paul presents this as the purpose of his ministry as he urges the Corinthians to be reconciled to God (vv. 18–21).

5:11 fear of the Lord Involves reverence for Christ, His mercy and sacrifice. See Prov 14:2; compare Eccl 3:14.

5:12 not commending ourselves See note on 2 Cor 3:1.

5:12 those who boast in appearance Paul’s opponents may have boasted in their rhetorical skill (see 11:6) or status as Jews (11:22). Paul insists that such boasting is not profitable. He instead boasts in his weakness because that is where Christ’s power is displayed more clearly (see 12:9–10). See 1 Cor 1:29 and note.

5:13 out of our senses Some of the individuals in the Corinthian church may have regarded Paul as crazy or foolish. Alternatively, Paul could be alluding to the painful letter he sent to the Corinthians (see 2 Cor 2:4), which may have negatively shaped their view of him.

5:14 love of Christ The Greek text here could refer to the love that Christ has for people or the love they have for Him.

5:15 he died for all Probably means that Christ died for all people without distinction (e.g., gender, social status). However, not all receive the benefits of His atoning death; only those who believe the gospel and live for Christ do.

5:15 for the one who died for them Christ’s death breaks the power of sin so that believers may live for the purposes of God (see Rom 3:9).

5:16 from a human point of view Indicates assessing someone according to the common person’s values and standards. Some within the Corinthian church evaluated Paul and his ministry according to this perspective and standard (1 Cor 1:17; 2 Cor 10:10).

5:16 known Christ from a human point Before choosing to follow Jesus, Paul and his other Jewish companions evaluated Jesus and His messianic claim according to their own standards.

5:17 in Christ Refers to being in union with Christ through the Holy Spirit; those who believe in Christ participate in His death and resurrection.

5:17 new creation Believers are transformed in Christ as part of God’s renewal of all creation (Rom 8:19–20; compare Isa 65:17–25). As a new creation, believers grow into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; compare Col 3:10).

5:18 reconciled us Refers to the end of hostility between God and people. Christ's death provided the means of reconciliation. His suffering made peace between God and humanity possible (see Isa 53:5 and note; compare note on 2 Cor 1:3).

5:18 ministry of reconciliation Paul presented Christ's sacrifice as the basis of reconciliation and the source of his apostolic vocation (vv. 14–18). He wants the Corinthians to understand the centrality of Christ in his ministry in contrast to other teachers, who boast about themselves.

5:19 the world The Hebrew word used here, *kosmos*, refers to people estranged from God and under the influence of sin and the devil (see 4:4).

5:19 not counting their trespasses against them God does not use people's sins as a reason to withhold salvation or reconciliation. Compare Rom 4:7–8.

5:20 we are ambassadors Meaning representatives of Christ. Paul and his companions not only spoke on behalf of Christ, but their lives—namely, their endurance of suffering—represented Christ's life and character. As Christ's representatives, they were charged with presenting the message of God's plan of reconciliation to the world.

5:21 who did not know sin Paul affirms that Christ did not sin, though He was tempted (Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13; Heb 4:15).

5:21 to be sin This describes how God regarded Christ as sin for the sake of undeserving sinners (compare Gal 3:13). More specifically, Paul may be presenting Christ as a substitute for sinful humanity or he could be referring to Christ's identification with sin through His union with sinful humanity. Another possibility is that Paul is interpreting Christ's sacrifice in light of OT sacrificial concepts (e.g., Lev 4:24; 5:12; Isa 53:10).

5:21 the righteousness of God Through Christ's death and resurrection, God demonstrated His righteousness (*dikaïosynē*) by judging sin yet showing mercy to sinners. Here Paul refers to the idea of Christians becoming the righteousness of God. He may mean that believers, as a result of God's justification, receive a right standing before God while Christ takes on their sins (Rom 5:8). Alternatively, Paul could be describing God's righteous character, which believers receive and should live out in their lives. See Rom 1:17 and note.

6:1 grace The Greek word used here, *charis*, refers in this instance to the unmerited favour God demonstrated in the sacrificial death of Christ (5:14–19). Christ's death is the reason why people can freely enter into a relationship with God.

6:2 day of salvation I helped you Paul quotes Isa 49:8 to appeal to the Corinthians and emphasize God's readiness to receive them when they turn to Him. Just as God restored Israel from exile, He now reconciles people to Himself through Christ (see note on 2 Cor 1:3). The day of salvation refers to the present period of time (between Christ's first and second comings) in which reconciliation with God is available to all people.



You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

2 Corinthians 6:12-13



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-7:4

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

¹¹ We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. ¹² You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. ¹³ In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.

¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;

then I will welcome you,

¹⁸ and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.”

7 ¹ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

² Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. ³ I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.

⁴ I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.



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MESSAGE NOTES



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul has done all he could, as God’s servant, to help them along (vv. 3–4). They should trust him, for he has suffered physical (vv. 5–6) and emotional abuse (vv. 7–8) and constant misunderstanding (vv. 9–10). Yet Paul has openly shared the love in his heart with the Corinthians—and how he yearns for them to respond with similar love to him (vv. 11–13). He then warns about being yoked with unbelievers (6:14–7:1).

Paul again expresses his love for the Corinthians and his confidence in them. Such “great confidence in you” may seem strange in view of the conflicts that erupted so often in Corinth. But it is based on Paul’s conviction that God will surely perform His transforming work in the believers there (7:2–4; cf. 5:14–17).

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 6:12-13

Love must be given.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Keep on loving even when love is not returned.

DISCOVER TRUTH

Why does Paul live his life above reproach? (6:3)

Describe any examples of the physical sufferings and hardships of Paul which you can remember from other parts of the Bible.

How does each of these things commend Paul to the church in Corinth as a faithful servant of the Gospel? (6:6-7)

Purity:

Knowledge:

Patience:

Kindness:

Holy Spirit:

Genuine love:

Truthful speech:

Power of God:

Weapons of righteousness:

How do the negative things in Paul's life take on a positive for the Gospel?

Honour and dishonour:

Slander and praise:

Imposters and yet true:

Known and yet well known:

Dying and behold alive:

Punished and yet not killed:

Sorrowful and yet rejoicing:

Poor and yet rich:

Having nothing yet possessing everything:

WORD STUDY

What does it mean to be “unequally yoked”? (6:11)

Cross Reference: 1 Corinthians 7:12-14;

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

What does God agree to do for His people in response to their faithfulness? (6:16-18)

What promise does Paul refer to in 7:1?

APPLY TRUTH

Paul opens his heart wide to the Corinthians, yet they restrict their affections for him. Have you ever experienced this? Explain.

Is there someone currently who you are either restricting your feelings towards or vice versa?

What kind of separation is Paul calling us to? How can we strike a balance between separating ourselves from sinful practices that mess up our spiritual lives while at the same time maintaining friendships with unbelieving neighbours and co-workers?

EXTRA

What does it mean to you that you are the swelling place of God? (6:16)

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a listen to **Is It Sinful to Date a Non-Christian?** by John Piper.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-it-sinful-to-date-a-non-christian>

COMMENTARY

6:4–7 *In several letters, Paul details the hardships he faced in his ministry (e.g., Rom 8:35; 1 Cor 4:9–13; 2 Cor 4:8–9; 11:23–29). Hellenistic writers in Paul’s day used such lists to promote their own virtue. Paul, by contrast, boasted of his struggles because they highlight God’s power working through his weakness (4:7; 12:9–10). The virtues listed in vv. 6–7 recall similar lists in the NT (e.g., Gal 5:22–23; Phil 4:8; 1 Pet 3:8; 2 Pet 1:5–7).*

6:5 beatings See Acts 16:37; 18:17; 21:32.

6:5 prisons See Acts 16:23; 20:23; 24:27.

6:6 purity See Acts 21:21–24; see 2 Cor 1:12 and note.

6:7 word of truth See 4:2.

6:7 power of God See 1 Cor 1:24 and note.

6:7 weapons of righteousness Refers to weapons that equip believers to live righteously and resist the work of evil forces. Compare Rom 6:13; 2 Cor 10:4; Eph 6:10–20; 1 Thess 5:8.

6:8–10 The contrasting description of Paul’s ministry highlights its true nature against the outward appearance of his conduct (2 Cor 4:16–18). The negative descriptions in these verses probably reflect accusations of misconduct by Paul’s opponents, who sought to discredit his apostleship.

6:11 heart is open wide Paul pleads with the Corinthians to return the affection that he and his missionary companions have demonstrated to them. He makes this plea because there are some in Corinth who are trying to turn the community against them.

6:13 speaking as to children Since Paul founded the church in Corinth, he regards the believers as his spiritual children (1 Cor 4:14; compare Gal 4:19).

6:13 open wide your hearts Paul will repeat this appeal (2 Cor 7:2) as he closes his defence of his apostolic ministry (2:17–7:4). See note on v. 11.

6:14–7:1 After encouraging the Corinthians to be reconciled to God, Paul exhorts them to separate themselves from anything unclean in Corinth. This would include idolatry (v. 16) as well as false apostles who undermine Paul’s authority (11:1–15). Paul cites several OT passages that speak of God’s adoption of His people (vv. 16–18). The promises in these passages—fulfilled in God’s work of reconciliation through Christ (5:17–19)—are the reason the Corinthian believers should separate from evil and be holy (7:1).

6:14 unevenly yoked with unbelievers Paul is not addressing the issue of marriage between believers and unbelievers here (compare 1 Cor 7:12–16); rather, he is urging the Corinthians to avoid aligning themselves with those who view him (and others) according to false standards (2 Cor 5:16). In allowing these unbelievers to have influence, the Corinthians cause rebellion against Paul and dissolve the unity of the church in Corinth.

6:14 righteousness and lawlessness Paul uses the same contrast to exhort believers not to bring their disputes before unbelievers (1 Cor 6:1).

6:15 Beliar The Greek term used here, *beliar*, comes from a similar Hebrew word, *beliyya’al*, that literally means “worthless.” The OT used this term to describe people who were wicked or lawless (Deut 13:13; 1 Sam 2:12; 1 Kgs 21:10; Prov 6:12). In later Jewish literature, it was used as a proper noun to refer to Satan (see Testament of Levi 19:1, which contrasts “light” with “darkness” and “the law of the Lord” with “the works of *beliar*”).

6:16 the temple of God have with idols Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are God’s temple—individually and collectively (see note on 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). Therefore, they must not engage in idolatry, whether inside or outside a pagan temple. Some of the Corinthians were compromising proper worship of God by choosing to worship like unbelievers.

6:16 they will be my people Paul quotes the covenant formula found several places in the OT (e.g., Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 31:33; Ezek 11:20).

6:17 come out from their midst Paul quotes Isa 52:11 to urge the believers in Corinth to separate themselves from the harmful influence of unbelievers. Such people opposed Paul and divided the church; the Corinthians must no longer tolerate their divisiveness.

6:17 I will welcome you Paul is most likely quoting Ezek 20:34 (compare Ezek 20:41; Zeph 3:20), where God promises exiled Israel that He will gather and restore them to His covenant (Ezek 20:37–38). Paul encourages the Corinthians to separate themselves from harmful influence and be fully reconciled to God.

6:18 I will be a father to you In 2 Cor 6:16, Paul quoted the covenant formula. Here he quotes the adoption formula, where God promises to be a father to David’s son (2 Sam 7:14). Paul combines 2 Sam 7:14 with Isa 43:6 to apply God’s promise of adoption to all His people (compare Rom 8:14–15; Gal 3:26).

7:1 since we have these promises Refers to the OT quotations in 2 Cor 6:16–18. God’s adoption of His people calls the Corinthian believers to holiness. They must not associate with those who seek to divide the church or who tempt them to engage in idolatry (see note on 6:14–7:1).

7:2–4 Paul concludes the lengthy defense of his ministry (2:14–7:4) by repeating his desire for the Corinthians to open their hearts to him (vv. 2; 6:13). He defends his behavior (v. 2) and motivation (v. 3), characterizing both as pure. Finally, he expresses his confidence in the Corinthians (v. 4).

7:2 Make room for us in your hearts Paul repeats his appeal from 6:13 (see note on 6:11).

7:2 We have wronged no one See note on 1:12; compare note on 6:3–10.

7:3 do not say this to condemn you Paul clarifies that he is not assigning blame, nor does he find fault with the Corinthians. Rather, he is defending himself against unwarranted accusations.

7:4 I am filled with encouragement Paul exhibits confidence because of the report of Titus, his missionary companion who visited Corinth on his behalf (v. 7).



As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

2 Corinthians 7:9



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 7:5-16

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. ⁸ For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. ⁹ As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. ¹¹ For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. ¹² So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. ¹³ Therefore we are comforted.

And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. ¹⁴ For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. ¹⁵ And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. ¹⁶ I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.



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MESSAGE NOTES



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Now comes word of what seems to be a breakthrough, perhaps delivered even as Paul is writing this letter. Titus returns from a visit to Corinth to report that many there did care and were responding to the apostle's appeals (vv. 5–7). Paul mentions a letter which “caused you sorrow.” This missive, known to scholars as Paul’s “severe letter,” has not been preserved. But it clearly had an impact on many in the busy trade centre of Corinth (vv. 8–13). Paul was also delighted at the report by Titus of his warm reception. So at this point in his letter Paul seems relieved, and all in Corinth seems on the mend (vv. 14–16).

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 7:9

Good grief!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Don't hesitate to correct someone you love just because it's unpleasant for you—or for him/her.

DISCOVER TRUTH

What is Paul troubled over? (7:5)

In what did Paul find comfort? (7:6-7)

Observe every reference to joy in 7:4-16. Identify the cause of joy in each case.

2 Corinthians 7:4

2 Corinthians 7:7

2 Corinthians 7:9

2 Corinthians 7:13

2 Corinthians 7:6

WORD STUDY

Repentance is...

- A change of mind,
- Brought about by godly sorrow that,
- Results in a change of life.

Show each part of this definition from verse 9-11.

Explain each of the fruits of godly sorrow and repentance... (7:11)

Earnestness:

Clear yourself:

Indignation:

Fear:

Longing:

Zeal:

Punishment:

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

What is the difference between condemning someone and correcting someone?

In what way is guilt positive?

In what way is guilt negative?

APPLY TRUTH

What are some ways you try and avoid genuine repentance?

Is there a particular area in which you need to genuinely repent right now?

EXTRA

How do you decide when it is more loving to confront someone with their sin than to ignore?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a read of **A Recipe for Repentance** by Josh Squires.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-recipe-for-repentance>

COMMENTARY

7:5–16 Paul returns to his travel details after a long defense and explanation of the nature of his apostleship under the new covenant (2:14–7:4). He picks up where he left off in 2:13 with his arrival in Macedonia (v. 5). He then expresses the comfort and encouragement he felt when hearing about the Corinthians' repentance and obedience from Titus (7:6–15). As in v. 4, he expresses his confidence in the Corinthians (v. 16).

7:5 when we arrived in Macedonia Paul resumes the account of his travel from 2:13.

7:6 comforts See 1:3 and note.

7:6 Titus See Titus 1:4.

7:7 your mourning Titus confirmed that the Corinthians responded to Paul's previous letter with repentance (2 Cor 7:8).

7:8 my letter It is uncertain what specific issues Paul addressed in his letter, but there may have been some hostility toward him and his apostleship. His opponents accused him of writing to frighten or intimidate the Corinthian believers (see 10:9 and note). While his letter caused them grief, his intention was to prompt them to turn from their sin and return to God (v. 9). See 2:3 and note.

7:9 grieved to repentance Godly sorrow requires more than just emotion; it requires action (Matt 3:8; Luke 3:8). See 2 Cor 2:5–11 and note.

7:10 leading to salvation Paul contrasts godly grief with worldly grief: Godly grief leads to salvation, whereas worldly grief leads to death. This is because godly grief brings repentance or a desire to change. In v. 11, Paul points to the ways godly grief benefited the Corinthian believers.

7:12 one who did wrong Probably refers to the person who opposed Paul and questioned his apostolic authority (see 2:5–8).

7:12 one who had been wronged Refers to Paul.

7:12 diligence Refers to the Corinthians' effort to be reconciled with Paul. The person who opposed Paul created division in the church. Paul hopes the

believers will once again demonstrate their loyalty to his authority so that they can be unified around Christ's teachings again and thus help spread the gospel.

7:13 have been encouraged Paul is encouraged by the Corinthians' repentance and their renewed partnership with him.

7:13 refreshed by all of you Since some Corinthians expressed hostility toward Paul, he may have felt concern about how believers would receive Titus, his representative; Paul was relieved to know that they provided adequate hospitality for his co-worker.

7:14 have boasted Paul complimented the Corinthian believers when speaking to Titus about them. They experienced a powerful demonstration of the Spirit when Paul ministered in Corinth (1 Cor 2:4).

7:14 everything to you in truth Probably refers to the explanation about his travel plans (see note on 2 Cor 1:17).

7:14 proven to be true Their repentance also demonstrated the Spirit's work among them.

7:15 fear and trembling Suggests the Corinthians acknowledged Titus' representation of Paul's apostolic authority.

7:16 completely confident Paul rejoices because his confidence in the Corinthian church has not been in vain (see v. 13 and note). Here, his rejoicing serves as a transition to the next section (8:1–9:15), where Paul asks the Corinthians to donate to the collection for the church in Jerusalem, confident that they will willingly help (9:1–2).



For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-24

ESV – English Standard Version

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¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰ And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹ So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹² For if the readiness is there, it is

acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵ As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

¹⁶ But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹ And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. ²⁰ We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man. ²² And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. ²⁴ So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.



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MESSAGE NOTES



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul now gives instructions concerning a collection being taken up for Jerusalem Christians. In doing so he lays out a total philosophy of New Testament giving which replaces the Old Testament principle of the tithe. Paul urges believers to respond to the needs of others and give generously, but not because they have to give (8:1–8). In giving we follow Jesus, who gave everything for us. So it is appropriate to give what we can (vv. 9–12). Paul says that giving is sharing: It is meeting desperate needs so that our brothers and sisters can live and function as believers. And it is reciprocal, for we will receive when we are in need (vv. 13–15).

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 8:9

Christ offered Himself willingly and sacrificially—an example for all believers

PERSONAL APPLICATION

believers ought to appreciate and imitate Jesus' self-sacrifice on behalf of others.

DISCOVER TRUTH

What do we know about this collection for the church from the following passages?

2 Corinthians 16:1-4

Romans 15:25-27

Galatians 2:9-10

Acts 24:17

What does Paul say about the character of the generosity he witnessed in the Macedonians? (8:1-5)

What was Paul's advice to the church in Corinth about their own giving? (8:10-11)

WORD STUDY

What is the relationship between Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and our generosity and giving?

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

Does it strike you as odd or meaningful that Paul never used the word "money" in his instructions? Explain.

How does Paul describe this generous aid?

Cross Reference: 2 Corinthians 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 19, 20; 2 Corinthians 9:1, 5, 8, 15)

APPLY TRUTH

What is a Christians obligation when deciding how much they give to the Lord's work?

Where is God calling you to grow in your generosity?

EXTRA

Do you think the phrase “Not equal gifts but equal sacrifice!” reflect Paul's principles of fairness and proportionality outlined in this text?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a listen to **An Abundance of Joy - 2 Corinthians 8:1–2** by John Piper
<https://www.desiringgod.org/labs/an-abundance-of-joy>

COMMENTARY

8:1–15 Paul introduces the topic of the collection for the church in Jerusalem (8:1–9:15). He uses the example of the Macedonian churches' generosity to encourage the Corinthians to also give generously (vv. 1–6). Paul emphasizes that he is not commanding the Corinthians to give; rather, he is giving them an opportunity to follow Jesus' example by showing grace to the poorer believers in Jerusalem (vv. 7–15).

8:1 the grace of God that has been given Refers to God's kindness and grace as expressed in the generosity of the Macedonian churches. Paul also references the Macedonians' generosity in Romans (see Rom 15:26).

8:1 churches of Macedonia This includes the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Paul visited these churches during his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 16:11–17:15; 20:1–6).

8:2 wealth of their generosity The Macedonian churches experienced adversity through hardships, yet they displayed generosity for the sake of others. These churches are an example of Paul's ministry (2 Cor 4:7–12).

8:3 by their own choice These churches gave willingly and sacrificially.

8:4 saints Refers to the poor Jewish believers in the church at Jerusalem. Paul is gathering financial relief from the various Gentile churches for the Jewish Christians as a gesture of solidarity.

8:5 by the will of God Paul emphasizes that the Macedonian churches gave according to God's authority. Paul uses this same phrase to defend his apostolic authority as coming from God (see 2 Cor 1:1 and note).

8:6 Titus Paul sent Titus, his missionary companion, to complete the collection of financial relief to benefit the church in Jerusalem (vv. 17–24; 9:3–5).

8:6 he had previously begun See note on v. 10.

8:7 everything Refers to the spiritual gifts of the Corinthian believers (see 1 Cor 1:4–5).

8:7 in speaking See 1 Cor 1:5.

8:7 in knowledge See 1 Cor 1:5.

8:7 this grace The Greek word used here, *charis*, refers to an expression of generosity, and specifically in this instance to the collection for the church in Jerusalem. See note on 2 Cor 8:4.

8:8 not saying this as a command If Paul were to command the Corinthian believers to give, he would take away the opportunity for them to express generosity; he would also give some of them further reason to call his apostleship into question. He wants them to be free of any compulsion (see 9:7 and note).

8:8 diligence of others The generosity of the Macedonian churches sets an example for the Corinthian believers (compare note on v. 2). Paul also used those churches as a standard to test the sincerity of the Corinthians' love for other believers.

8:9 grace of our Lord Jesus Christ Refers to Jesus' generosity expressed in His incarnation and death. Christ offered Himself willingly and sacrificially—an example for all believers (John 10:18; 1 John 3:16).

8:9 although he was rich Refers to Jesus' pre-existence as the Son of God. He enjoyed the presence of the Father and shared in His glory (John 17:5).

8:9 he became poor Refers to the incarnation of Jesus and His social standing while on earth (Luke 9:58). Paul probably has in mind Jesus' earthly poverty, as well as His suffering and death (e.g., Phil 2:6–8). Paul uses Jesus' choice to become poor as the basis of his appeal for the Jerusalem collection.

8:9 may become rich Refers to the gift of salvation and its blessings—namely, the inheritance of God's kingdom, the righteousness of God, and glorification (1 Cor 15:50; 2 Cor 5:21). The Corinthian believers ought to appreciate and imitate Jesus' self-sacrifice on behalf of others.

8:10 began previously, a year ago Paul had originally laid the groundwork for this collection in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 16:1–4).

8:11 you have the eagerness The Corinthian believers have expressed their desire to contribute (1 Cor 16:1–3); Paul encourages them to follow through and turn their desire into action.

8:12 according to what one has Echoes Jesus' teaching on giving and generosity (see Mark 12:41–44). Paul encourages the Corinthians to give according to their desire and means.

8:13 there may be relief Paul does not intend that the church in Corinth and the church in Jerusalem trade financial situations; he wants the abundance in Corinth to benefit Jerusalem.

8:14 their abundance Paul envisions a time when the Corinthian church may need financial assistance. In such a circumstance, the abundance of other churches will supply their need. With this, Paul suggests a system in which churches aid one another in difficult times, such as during a famine or hardship involving large amounts of poor people needing assistance.

8:15 As it is written Paul quotes Exod 16:18, a verse showing how God sufficiently supplied the needs of the Israelites in the wilderness by providing manna (bread) and quail (Exod 16:1–36). Just as God provided equally for His people then, the Corinthians should look to provide equality among believers now.

8:16–24 Paul includes a brief aside to give a letter of recommendation for Titus and two other unnamed men who will deliver his letter to the Corinthian church. Paul describes Titus as a coworker who shares his concerns and values (2 Cor 8:16–17). He describes the first “brother” as someone with a good reputation who was chosen by the churches to be Paul’s travel companion (vv. 18–19). Paul describes the second “brother” as someone who has been tested and proven diligent (v. 22). He encourages the Corinthians to show these three men proof of their love and thereby validate Paul’s boasts (v. 24).

8:16 Titus See Titus 1:4.

8:18 brother The identity of this brother in Christ is unknown. He may have been Apollos (Acts 18:24–28), Timothy (a co-sender of 2 Corinthians; 2 Cor 1:1), or one of Paul’s Macedonian traveling companions listed in Acts 19:29. The fact that Paul does not mention his name probably indicates that the church already knew him.

8:19 this gift Refers to the collection of financial relief for the saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:4).

8:20 lest anyone should find fault with us Paul planned to have several men accompany him to deliver the financial relief collection to Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:3–4). These men ensured that all the money arrived safely and allowed Paul to avoid any accusations that he mishandled the money.

8:21 but also before people Paul echoes Prov 3:4 to explain the motivation for having a team accompany him and the collection to Jerusalem; he wants handling of this gift to be above criticism.

8:22 our brother Paul expresses confidence in the integrity of this “brother.” He hopes that his boasting about this “brother” and Titus will cause the Corinthians to treat them with respect and honour. See note on 2 Cor 8:18.

8:23 messengers The Greek word used here, *apostoloi*, often translated as “messengers,” literally means “apostles” (see note on 1 Cor 12:28). Paul concludes by endorsing all three men as representatives of the churches who are working for the glory of Christ (2 Cor 4:4–6).

8:24 proof of your love In the first century, hospitality was the practical demonstration of love for visitors (John 13:20; Heb 13:2). Paul encourages the

Corinthian believers to receive these three men with love and validate his boasting about them (see 2 Cor 7:16 and note).



Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
2 Corinthians 9:7



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:1-15

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹ Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will

be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!



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MESSAGE NOTES



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

After a few organizational and procedural remarks (8:16–9:5) Paul returns to basic principles. Generous giving means a rich return, for no one can out give God (vv. 6–9). We need not fear to give. God can and will supply what we need (vv. 10–12). And our giving brings God glory through prayers of thanks that will also bring the giver’s name before the Lord (vv. 13–15).

KEY VERSE

2 Corinthians 9:7

Give with your heart.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Let God guide you into the joy of giving.

DISCOVER TRUTH

Why does Paul say it unnecessary for him to write to the Corinthians about giving? (9:1)

2 Corinthians 9:2a

2 Corinthians 9:2b

2 Corinthians 9:2c

If he considers it unnecessary to write to them about giving, then why does he write about it? (9:3-5)

2 Corinthians 9:3a

2 Corinthians 9:3b

2 Corinthians 9:4

2 Corinthians 9:5c

What kind of gift did Paul expect should come from these fellow believers? (9:5b)

What three principles are to guide our giving? (9:6-7)

What is God's response to our giving? (9:8)

WORD STUDY

Psalm 112 describes the blessings of the person who fears God and delights in His commandments. How does this relate to what Paul is saying in this context? (9:8-10)

What should God's blessings toward us do for our giving? (9:11)

What is the “inexpressible gift” of God that is referred to in this context?
(9:15)

Cross Reference: 2 Corinthians 9:8, 14; 8:1

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

When we give to help others, are we losing something, or gaining something? Explain. (9:6)

Cross Reference: Proverbs 11:24-25; 1 Timothy 6:17-19

APPLY TRUTH

Paul seems to connect the attributes of love and earnestness to generosity and giving. What do your spending habits reveal about what you are most earnest about?

In what areas of giving and generosity are you in need of the kind of rebukes that Paul gives the Corinthians?

EXTRA

Is it possible to out give God? Explain.

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a read of **Lord, All I Have Is Yours** by Jon Bloom.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lord-all-i-have-is-yours>

COMMENTARY

9:1–15 Having endorsed Titus and two other men (8:16–24), Paul returns to the subject of the collection for the church in Jerusalem. Paul explains that he is sending Titus and the others so that the Corinthians' contribution can be ready when he visits. He points out that he has boasted about their willingness to help, and that he, along with the Corinthians themselves, would be embarrassed if he arrived with the Macedonians and found them unprepared (vv. 1–5). Paul encourages the Corinthians to give generously by arguing that God loves a cheerful giver (vv. 6–11). Their generosity would not only supply the needs of those in Jerusalem, it would also serve as an expression of thanksgiving to God and unite Jewish and Gentile believers (vv. 12–15).

9:1 ministry to the saints Refers to the collection of financial relief Paul is gathering for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Since the Corinthians already knew about this project (1 Cor 16:1–4), Paul did not need to explain it to them again. See note on 2 Cor 8:4.

9:2 Macedonians See note on 8:1.

9:2 ready to help since last year Paul advised the Corinthians to set aside money for this collection last year (1 Cor 16:1–3). Their enthusiasm for this project inspired other churches to participate, even though the Corinthians had not yet contributed.

9:3 sending the brothers A team of believers would have collected the offering the Corinthian believers set aside for this project (1 Cor 16:1–3; 2 Cor 8:16–24). Paul presents this as an opportunity for the Corinthians to demonstrate the authenticity of their faith and love for the saints.

9:4 would be humiliated Paul risked his reputation by commending the Corinthians' eagerness and generosity to the Macedonians. He presents their example as motivation to have their gift ready when Titus and the others arrive.

9:5 generous gift In the first century, the city of Corinth was renowned for its prosperity. Although some believers were not wealthy (1 Cor 1:26–29), the church as a whole possessed more than other churches. Paul wants to ensure that they give their generous gift with the right attitude and motivation; he sends some believers to help organize the gift to remove any sense of compulsion.

9:5 promised previously See 2 Cor 8:10 and note; compare 8:11.

9:7 cheerful giver Paul echoes Prov 22:9 and other OT passages to emphasize God's delight in those who give with the right attitude (compare Exod 25:2; 35:5; Deut 15:10).

9:8 God is able to cause all grace The Corinthians may have felt concerned about giving money because of the uncertainty of life in the ancient world. Paul does not want this to be reason for them to withhold their generosity. Paul affirms that God can provide everything they need, just as He is doing for the church in Jerusalem.

9:9 his righteousness remains forever Paul quotes Psa 112:9 to suggest that giving alms and being generous are expressions of God's righteousness.

9:10 supplies seed Paul alludes to Isa 55:10—a song of joy celebrating Israel's promised restoration (see note on 2 Cor 1:3)—as further support that God provides for His creation. For this reason, the Corinthian believers should feel free to give generously to the collection, without fear that their own needs will go unmet.

9:11 generosity Paul wants the Corinthians to understand that their abundance exists for the sake of generosity and thanksgiving. See 8:14–15.

9:12 service of this ministry Paul points out that the Corinthians' generosity would not only benefit the church in Jerusalem, it would also be a gift of thanksgiving to God (see note on v. 7). See note on v. 1.

9:14 grace of God Paul's use of *charis* refers to the kindness expressed in generosity, but it may also include knowledge of God for salvation (see also 8:1).

9:15 his indescribable gift Refers to Christ, who brought about salvation through His life, death, and resurrection. It may also refer to His generosity: He became poor so that those who believe in Him might become rich (8:9). Paul appropriately closes his appeal for the Corinthian church to give generously by thanking God for His generous gift.



For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

2 Corinthians 10:4



READ SCRIPTURE

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2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-18

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹ I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—

² I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

⁷ Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. ⁸ For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. ⁹ I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. ¹⁰ For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." ¹¹ Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. ¹² Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one

another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

¹³ But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. ¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵ We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶ so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. ¹⁷ "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.



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MESSAGE NOTES



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul tells those in Corinth who are still antagonistic that they are “looking only on the surface of things.” His authority as an apostle is both spiritual in nature—and overwhelmingly powerful (10:1–11). Paul then indirectly ridicules the false apostles who have come to Corinth and boast of the superiority of their teaching and wisdom over that of others. Paul will speak only of his own ministry and work with no concern for that done “in another man’s territory” (vv. 12–16). In fact, however, all boasting is illegitimate. God is the one who does the work (v. 17), and He is the source of the only commendation that counts (v. 18).

KEY VERSE

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4

Count on God.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

We can do better than the other person, and still fall far short of what God wants. So, don’t compare.

DISCOVER TRUTH

What are some of the charges laid against Paul by his critics? (10:1, 10)

What is Paul’s attitude in dealing with slander and accusations? (10:1–5)

What do the following verses tell us about Paul’s...

Relationship to Christ (10:7)

Authority in ministry (10:8a)

Purposes in ministry (10:8b)

Consistency in ministering (10:10-11)

WORD STUDY

What is the difference between “walking in the flesh” and “waging war according to the flesh”? (10:3)

Cross Reference: James 4:1-4

Compare 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 and Ephesians 6:10-20. Explain how these passages reinforce each other.

What does Paul mean by “glorying in the Lord”? (10:17)

Cross Reference: 1 Corinthians 1:31

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

Paul commends us to be meek, gentle, and humble, yet bold and confident when we address someone in the wrong. How do we balance these seemingly opposite characteristics?

How wise is it to compare ourselves to others? (10:12)

APPLY TRUTH

Where in your life have you experienced the kind of warfare that Paul speaks of taking place?

How can you improve your effectiveness in these spiritual battles?

EXTRA

How does Paul in this passage demonstrate that he has been approved by the Lord?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a read of **The Joys of Love** by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-joys-of-love>

COMMENTARY

10:1–18 Paul changes topics here to address his opponents in Corinth (chs. 10–13), offering an impassioned defense of his apostleship. He begins by stating that God gave him his authority (v. 8). He encourages the Corinthians not to consider appearances (v. 7) and points out that he does not compare himself with others (v. 12). Paul then contrasts himself with those who commend themselves, pointing out that he only boasts in the Lord (vv. 12–18).

10:1 gentleness of Christ While Paul seeks to defend himself, he does not want to do so in an angry or indignant manner; rather, he seeks to emulate the humility and gentleness shown by Christ (8:9; Matt 11:29; Luke 18:14; see Gal 6:1).

10:1 am absent am bold toward you Paul is probably referring to how some of the Corinthians perceived him (compare 2 Cor 10:10).

10:2 behaving according to the flesh Some in the church community called Paul's character into question (compare 2:17). Their reasons may have been the change in his travel plans (1:15–2:4; see note on 1:23) or the perceived mishandling of the financial relief collection (12:16–18).

10:3 do not wage war according to the flesh Paul uses spiritual weapons—such as the gospel, faith, truth, and prayer—to wage battle against his opposition (compare 6:6–7; Eph 6:10–17).

10:4 fortresses This term is intended to refer to people's standard ways of thinking, especially about Paul and the nature of his apostleship.

10:5 captive to the obedience of Christ Implies believers must submit their thoughts to Christ and bring them into conformity with His will.

10:6 all disobedience Refers to opposition to Paul's apostolic authority. Compare 2 Cor 2:9.

10:7 according to appearance Some Corinthians continued to judge Paul and his ministry according to the standards of the time; they evaluated him according to his rhetoric, logic, and manner of reception by various communities.

10:8 authority that the Lord gave As he does throughout the letter, Paul emphasizes that his authority comes from God. See 1:1 and note.

10:8 building you up Some Corinthians may have perceived that Paul used his authority to oppress or take advantage of them (12:17). Paul identifies the true purpose of his authority: to strengthen the faith of believers so they grow in maturity.

10:9 I do not want to appear Paul’s wording here suggests that his opponents were accusing him of trying to frighten or intimidate the Corinthian believers with his letters. While Paul wrote things that grieved the Corinthians, he did not do so cruelly. Instead, he wrote out of love to encourage them toward repentance (see 2:4; compare 7:8–9).

10:9 my letters Paul most likely wrote at least two other letters to the Corinthians in addition to 1 and 2 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians, Paul refers to a previous letter where he instructed the Corinthians to not associate with immoral people (see 1 Cor 5:9). In 2 Corinthians, he refers to another letter which he wrote out of distress and anguish (see 2 Cor 2:3 and note).

10:10 his speech is of no account According to the Corinthians’ standard, Paul was not an impressive orator. Paul may not have used any rhetorical techniques when he presented the gospel to the Corinthians; God’s power, not Paul’s speech, gave the message credibility.

10:12 classify or to compare The opponents in Corinth compared their skill and gifts to Paul’s as a means to devalue his authority within the church community. Paul asserts that such comparisons merely derive from people’s perspectives and are useless; his apostolic authority comes from God (Acts 9:15; 2 Cor 10:18).

10:13 God has assigned Paul considered the Corinthian church to be his God-given ministry assignment ever since he first founded the community (v. 14). He did not get involved in churches that other missionaries had planted (e.g., Rom 15:18–20); thus, he expected his fellow workers in the gospel to respect his missionary field (see 2 Cor 10:16). This leads Paul to cast his opponents as false apostles, since they attempted to supplant his apostolic role in Corinth (see 11:13).

10:14 as far as you with the gospel Paul ministered in Corinth and established the church there during his second missionary journey (see Acts 18:1–16). The gospel (euangelion) refers to the new covenant brought about in Christ (2 Cor 3:6; 4:4–6; see note on 3:3), which Paul defined in his previous letter in terms of Christ’s death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:1–4). His opponents were teaching a “different gospel” that distorted God’s Word (2 Cor 4:2; see 11:4 and note).

10:15 to be enlarged greatly by you Since Paul viewed the Corinthian church as his letter of recommendation (see 3:1 and note, and 3:2), he hoped their growth would result in more opportunities for his ministry.

10:16 the regions that lie beyond you Paul hopes his ministry in Corinth will result in opportunities to preach the gospel further west. He wanted to visit Rome and Spain after traveling to Jerusalem to deliver the collection for the church there (8:1–9:15; see Rom 15:25–29).

10:16 assigned to someone else Refers to those who opposed Paul; these people likely boasted about the church community in Corinth as though they planted it and cared for it. In 1 Corinthians, Paul dealt with the division caused by Corinthian believers associating themselves with specific ministers of Christ (1 Cor 1:11–17).

10:17 let him boast in the Lord A quotation of Jer 9:24 (compare 1 Cor 1:31).

10:18 commending himself See note on 2 Cor 10:12.



For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.
2 Corinthians 11:13



READ SCRIPTURE

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2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-15

ESV – English Standard Version

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¹ I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! ² For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³ But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. ⁵ Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. ⁶ Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

⁷ Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. ¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹ And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

¹² And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the

same terms as we do. ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.



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CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul’s deep concern for the Corinthians now moves him to do what he has just shown to be “foolish”—boast and present his own credentials (11:1–6). Unlike the “super-apostles” who boast in Corinth, Paul hasn’t taken money from the Corinthians. Those who try to undermine his ministry for their own benefit are “false apostles,” simply masquerading as “angels of light” (vv. 7–15).

KEY VERSE

2 CORINTHIANS 11:13

Looks good?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Don’t judge another by appearances, but by his or her faithful service over a span of years.

DISCOVER TRUTH

What is the greatest danger for the Corinthians? (11:2-3)

What do we learn about the false prophets? (11:4)

Cross Reference: Galatians 1:6-10; 2:4

Explain the sarcasm in each of the following statements...

“... you put up with it readily enough.” (11:4)

**“... I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles.”
(11:5)**

Whose credentials does Paul compare himself against? (11:5)

What reasons did Paul give for taking financial support from the Corinthians?

2 Corinthians 11:7

2 Corinthians 11:8

2 Corinthians 11:9

2 Corinthians 11:11

2 Corinthians 11:12

WORD STUDY

How can “jealousy” be a “divine” quality? (11:2)

What short coming did Paul admit to? (11:6) How is this relevant?

What are Paul's opponents like? (11:14-15)

Cross Reference: Philippians 3:18-19

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

Why do people have a hard time believing that someone would make such a great sacrifice for the benefit of others? (11:7-8)

What is the danger of judging the motives behind another person's actions? (11:7-12)

APPLY TRUTH

Paul sought to humble himself in order to honour and exalt the Corinthians. What are some ways you can humble yourself so that others may be exalted this week?

EXTRA

What are the criteria for a true apostle? (12:12)

Cross Reference: Mark 16:17-20; Acts 2:22

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a read or listen to **Christ Will Not Paint on a Proud Canvas** by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/christ-will-not-paint-on-a-proud-canvas>

COMMENTARY

11:1–15 In this section, Paul defends himself against his opponents, whom he sarcastically calls *super-apostles* (see v. 5 and note). He compares them to the serpent that deceived Eve (v. 3), calling them *false apostles and deceitful workers* (v. 13). Paul defends his ministry by pointing out that he did not accept payment while in Corinth (vv. 7–9); his motive for ministry is the expansion of Christ's kingdom, not payment or respect (see 12:14).

11:1 a little foolish Paul is being sarcastic: the *super-apostles* (v. 5) considered Paul's message and methods to be absurd. See 1 Cor 1:18.

11:2 with a godly jealousy Not resentment or envy, but intense devotion—like the devotion God had for His own people (Exod 20:5). Paul planted the church in Corinth, but they rebelled against him; Paul considers it his responsibility to bring them back to genuine faith through his godly jealousy (*zeloō* in Greek).

11:2 promised you in marriage According to Jewish tradition, fathers were to present their daughters as virgins. Paul feels that the church at Corinth has been defiled by following false teachers and presents this analogy to make his point.

11:3 as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness Refers to the events of Gen 3:1–13. Eve believed the lie of the serpent, which convinced her to eat from the tree that God had forbidden.

11:3 craftiness By extension of his analogy, this refers to the deceitfulness of Paul's opponents in Corinth. These people cast doubt on God's promises and Paul's apostolic authority.

11:4 Jesus whom we have not proclaimed Paul's opponents may have downplayed the importance of Jesus' crucifixion, since Greeks considered crucifixion to be a sign of weakness (see 1 Cor 1:18). By contrast, Paul presented the crucifixion of Christ as the heart of his gospel (1 Cor 2:2; 2 Cor 13:4; Gal 3:1).

11:4 different spirit The so-called *super-apostles* either proclaimed that Christ wasn't crucified or that His crucifixion degraded Him as Saviour (compare note on 2 Cor 11:5; note on v. 1). In doing so, they preached the opposite message of Paul, who only wanted to proclaim Christ crucified (13:4; 1 Cor 1:18). Paul was

interested in their relationship with Jesus (compare 2 Cor 11:2), but his opponents were interested in their own gain (compare 1 Cor 4:6–13; 2 Cor 12:11–13). In this regard, the spirit of their teaching was one of arrogance.

11:4 different gospel Paul is likely referring to his opponents' culturally motivated attempts to undermine the importance of Jesus' sacrificial death as the pivotal component of the gospel (see 1 Cor 2:2).

11:5 preeminent apostles A sarcastic reference to Paul's opponents in Corinth, who were trying to turn the church community against him. These people may have also boasted about the Corinthian church as if they had planted it (2 Cor 10:12–15; compare 1 Cor 4:6–13).

11:6 unskilled in speech Paul's speaking abilities did not meet the standards of some in Corinth. Many people in the region were trained in professional rhetoric, which was highly valued in Greek culture.

11:6 not in knowledge Paul may be saying that he does not primarily possess knowledge, which would make this a parenthetical statement against the Corinthians' favoring of knowledge over proper understanding of the Spirit and the proper use of spiritual gifts. Alternatively, Paul may have meant that unlike the Corinthian false teachers, he has knowledge, but his knowledge differs from that prized in Greek circles. In 1 Corinthians 2:2, Paul dismisses knowledge as a deciding factor of authority.

11:7 did I commit a sin The Corinthians did not appreciate the purpose of Paul's work and hardship (Acts 18:1–6; 1 Cor 9:6–12). It is foolish of them to accuse Paul of wrongdoing when he endured much suffering for them.

11:7 without payment The false teachers' claim that Paul was motivated by self-interest is absurd. He was motivated only to bring them to Christ and further Jesus' work in the world (see 1 Cor 9:15; compare 1 Cor 9:18).

11:8 I robbed Paul uses hyperbole to emphasize that the super-apostles' view of him is absurd (compare note on 2 Cor 11:5). He actually raised support from the impoverished Macedonian churches so he could minister in Corinth (see 8:2; Phil 4:15), and he now requests that Corinth provide for churches with less wealth than them (see 2 Cor 8:4 and note).

11:9 not burden anyone While in Corinth, Paul provided for his own needs through manual labour and support from other churches (compare note on v. 7).

11:19 Macedonia See note on 1:16.

11:10 this boasting Paul takes satisfaction in preaching the gospel message without any payment. Doing so allows him to maintain the integrity of his ministry (1 Cor 9:18; see note on 2 Cor 2:17).

11:10 regions of Achaia See note on 1:1.

11:11 Because I do not love you The so-called super-apostles may have suggested that Paul did not have genuine affection for the Corinthians since he did not allow them to share in his ministry financially (compare note on v. 5). Paul dismisses any charge that he lacks affection for the church in Corinth.

11:12 of those who want an opportunity Paul did not want to accept any payment from the Corinthians, which distinguished him from the super-apostles who maligned him (v. 13; see note on 2:17). Compare note on v. 4, and note on v. 5.

11:13 false apostles Refers to those who exploited the Corinthian church for self-gain (compare note on 10:13). This group is likely synonymous with, or at least similar to, those Paul sarcastically refers to as super-apostles (see note on v. 5).

11:14 Satan See note on 1 Cor 5:5; Mark 1:13; compare 1 Thess 2:18.

11:14 angel of light May refer to the kind of angel who ministers to believers (Heb 1:14) or simply to a good spiritual being aligned with God's purposes (compare note on John 1:4). This comparison suggests that the false apostles came across as genuine while inwardly desiring to destroy the Church for their own benefit (see 2 Cor 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; compare note on v. 13; note on v. 5). The idea of Satan disguising himself as an angel of light recalls similar descriptions of Satan's activity in various ancient Jewish writings, though Paul does not seem directly dependent on them (e.g., Life of Adam and Eve 9:1; Apocalypse of Moses 17:1; Testament of Job 6:4; 17:2; 23:1).

11:15 his servants Suggests these servants, who may be the false apostles, actually serve Satan and stand as a threat to the Church (compare 2 Cor 11:13). See note on v. 14; compare note on 6:14).

11:15 servants of righteousness Refers to the "false apostles" who pretend to teach about *dikaïosynē*, or righteousness (compare 3:9).



But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
2 Corinthians 12:9



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-12:-13

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹⁶ I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. ¹⁷ What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. ¹⁸ Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. ¹⁹ For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! ²⁰ For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. ²¹ To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil

and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

12 ¹ I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. ⁵ On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—⁶ though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. ⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

¹¹ I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. ¹² The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. ¹³ For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!



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MESSAGE NOTES



COMPLETE THE STUDY GUIDE

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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul turns back to himself and his own “boasting” (vv. 16–21a). Paul’s credentials are impeccable. He, like the false apostles, is a Hebrew. He has proven his commitment as a servant of Christ by his sufferings and privations (vv. 21b–27) and by his own emotional burden for all the churches (vv. 28–29). Indeed, it is such “weaknesses” that Paul is most comfortable boasting about—for reasons he will explain in chapter 12 (vv. 30–33).

Paul explains that “weaknesses” are a source of boasting. After the apostle received a stunning revelation, being carried to heaven itself (12:1–6), Satan struck him with a “thorn in the flesh.” Most think this was a serious and disfiguring illness. Paul prayed earnestly for its removal, but was told “no.” Through this experience Paul learned “weakness” was a special call to rely on the Lord, who delights in showing His strength in weak people (vv. 7–9a). Now Paul gladly exposes his weaknesses, so his successes might be clearly seen to be achieved in Christ’s power (vv. 9b–10).

Despite his so-called “weaknesses” Paul hardly needs to take a backseat to the “super-apostles” the Corinthians are enamoured with (vv. 11–13).

KEY VERSE

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Real strength.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Don’t be afraid to be, or appear, weak.

DISCOVER TRUTH

What is the nature of Pauls boasting? (11:16-17, 30; 12:5, 9)

What makes Paul's boasting necessary? (11:18-19)

What is the difference between the way Paul treated the Corinthians and the manner which the false apostles did? (11:9, 20)

What is the nature of the false prophets? (11:21, 23-28)

WORD STUDY

What is the nature of most of Paul's adversities?

2 Corinthians 11:22

2 Corinthians 11:23

2 Corinthians 11:23b-25

2 Corinthians 11:26-27

2 Corinthians 11:28

Explain Paul's statements about being "in the body" or "out of the body". (12:2-3)

What is this “third heaven” Paul speaks of? (12:2, 4-5)

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

What did Paul choose to boast in? (11:30)

What was the nature and purpose of Paul’s “thorn”? (12:7-9)

APPLY TRUTH

In 2 Corinthians 11:28, Paul says he experiences the daily pressure for his anxiety for all the churches. In what way are you concerned for the local church?

Where do we find the strength to withstand hardships? (12:9-10)

EXTRA

Read Isaiah 43. How does Isaiah reinforce the idea that God's power is made perfect in weakness?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God's attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a read of **Church Planter, Reject the Corinthian Mindset** by Dan Steel

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/church-planter-reject-corinthian-mindset/>

COMMENTARY

11:16–21 The false apostles probably claimed that Paul's hardships invalidated his apostleship and made him look foolish (compare v. 13). Paul turns their accusations against them: He assumes the role of a fool to make them look foolish. His discussion of his hardships exposes the false apostles as people who are self-centred; they could never demonstrate Paul and his companions' endurance for the sake of bringing people to Christ and leading a church in Jesus' way and teachings. To support this claim, Paul outlines how poorly these "strong apostles" have treated the Corinthians (vv. 20–21). Paul has done the opposite for the Corinthians, even though he has been called weak (10:10).

11:17 foolishness Paul may be juxtaposing the common Greek idea of the foolish person versus the wise person (a dichotomy that also appears in Proverbs; e.g., Prov 1:7). People who consider themselves wise may actually end up looking foolish if their view is based on false assumptions or self-glorification. The false teachers of Corinth were foolishly ignoring the instruction of Paul, who had planted their church and led them to Christ. Their behaviour showed them to be foolish and weak, even though they claimed to be wise and strong. Compare note on 1 Cor 1:18; and note on 2 Cor 11:1.

11:18 human standards Unlike the false teachers, Paul is interested in Christ's work and His measurement of success. Even so, Paul can prove himself by their own standards (see vv. 22–33 and note).

11:19 because you are wise Paul sarcastically points out how foolish the Corinthians were to believe the false apostles (v. 13; compare v. 5). This is made more ironic by the fact that the Corinthians considered themselves to be wise (compare 1 Cor 1:20).

11:20 enslaves Paul means that, metaphorically speaking, the work of the super-apostles enslaves the Corinthian believers to sin by providing them with a false sense of freedom. Compare note on 2 Cor 11:5.

1:20 devours The so-called super-apostles are merely using the Corinthian believers for their own benefit (compare note on v. 5).

11:20 someone strikes you in the face Paul uses this metaphor to express his disbelief that the Corinthian believers cannot recognize the falsity of the super-apostles' teaching and work (see note on v. 4; compare note on v. 5).

11:21 to my shame In making this claim, Paul points out the false dichotomy that the Corinthian believers agree with. Although the super-apostles (see note on v. 5) claim that they should be honored, they actually live shameful lives (compare 1 Cor 4:14).

11:22–33 In this section, Paul outlines his most important achievements according to people's standards: his ethnicity (2 Cor 11:22), vocation (v. 23), and hardships (vv. 23–29). Paul does not actually place a high value on such things; he uses them to attest that even by the standards of the so-called super-apostles, he is greater, and yet he suffers for the sake of Christ and His church (12:11; compare note on v. 5). Compare Phil 3:4–7.

11:22 Are they Hebrews Paul lists this as one of many credentials for his missionary and apostolic work. He is not suggesting that being Jewish is a necessary qualification of ministers, but that it provides the benefit of knowing the OT and being raised in the same tradition as Jesus. See Phil 3:5.

11:24 forty lashes less one Thirty-nine lashes were believed to be the maximum number a person could endure before dying from such a beating. Receiving this number of lashings served as a public warning that suggested that, “if you do this again, you will die for it next time” (compare Matt 27:26).

11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods May reference and include Acts 16:22.

11:28 anxiety about all the churches False doctrine and division threatened the churches that Paul planted (Acts 20:30). He also wrote letters to several of these churches to combat the negative influence of other teachers (Gal 1:6–8; Eph 4:14; Phil 3:1–2; 1 Tim 1:6–7). The pressure Paul faced as a minister to these churches caused him to worry constantly about their well-being.

11:30 my weakness Refers to the hardships Paul suffered for the sake of believers (2 Cor 11:23–29).

11:32 Damascus See Acts 9:2.

11:32 King Aretas Specifically King Aretas IV, one of the Nabatean kings (9 BC–AD 40). Even though he had the title of king, Aretas was actually a governor. He defeated King Herod in a battle over a border dispute between Nabatea and Judaea.

11:32 take me into custody See Acts 9:23–24.

11:33 lowered through a window through the wall The Romans awarded their highest honor to the first soldier to scale the enemy's wall. Ironically—in comparison to the accusations that Paul was a lowly, shameful leader (see 2 Cor 11:5)—Paul was lowered down a wall to escape from Damascus (see Acts 9:23–25).

12:1–10 In this section Paul talks about visions and revelations. He tells about a man who was taken up to paradise (2 Cor 12:2–4). Paul is probably referring to himself in the third person here (v. 6). He then discusses his thorn in the flesh (see v. 7 and note). He asked God to remove it, but God did not so that Christ's power would be made evident in Paul's weakness (vv. 8–10).

12:1 visions Via a vision (*optasia* in Greek), prophets could see God's plan for the future. These visions also revealed what was happening (or would happen) in the spiritual world. Here, Paul is uncertain whether he had a bodily or only a spiritual experience (v. 3).

12:1 revelations The Greek word used here, *apokalypsis*, refers to God's unveiling information that was often previously unknown or concealed. In this instance, *apokalypsis* refers to God supplying Paul with information about his particular calling. At other times, it is used more broadly (see 1 Cor 14:6; compare Gal 2:2).

12:2 I know a man It appears that Paul is using the third-person voice to describe his own experience (2 Cor 12:6–10). He may have done this to avoid boasting; this may have also been typical of prophetic literature. (If Isaiah penned his own account of his vision in Isa 6, then he would have been speaking in the third person.)

12:2 in Christ To be in union with Christ, to have a relationship with Him. In this scenario, Paul indicates that the man, who is likely him, was in Christ's presence while having his vision.

12:2 fourteen years ago This event happened sometime between AD 41–43 depending on the precise date of 2 Corinthians.

12:2 third heaven Refers to the highest heaven (1 Kgs 8:27; 2 Chr 2:6; Psa 148:4). Paul's reference is probably intentionally vague, and it may simply serve to contrast the place where God and heavenly beings dwell against the place where people dwell (earth). If Paul does have a precise place in mind, then he probably is thinking of the third heaven as the highest heaven and the place of God's presence.

12:3 in the body or apart from the body Paul expresses uncertainty about whether the man was in his physical body during this experience. The man, who is likely Paul, may have been literally taken into heaven and then returned to earth, or he may have simply undergone a spiritual or mental experience. In Acts 9:1–9, Paul clearly experienced Christ bodily. There, Christ came to him on earth;

here, Paul went to Christ in heaven (at least spiritually, and possibly also physically).

12:4 he was caught up This is typical prophetic language for the work of the Holy Spirit temporarily taking over someone's life to give him or her a vision or revelation. The prophet Ezekiel used similar language (Ezek 2:2; 3:14; 8:3). See 1 Thess 4:17; compare 2 Cor 12:2, and v. 1.

12:4 paradise Probably refers to the highest heaven (see note on v. 2).

12:5 of such a person Likely refers to Paul. Alternatively, Paul could be telling the story of another Christian convert. If Paul is referring to himself, he makes the switch back to the first person here; in doing so, he emphasizes that his authority came from God, not from his own decisions or persuasiveness. Paul can boast on behalf of what God did for him in Christ, not in who he is. See note on v. 2.

12:5 my weaknesses Refers to Paul's hardships in ministry (11:23–29) and his forthcoming reference in v. 7.

12:6 I want to boast See 1 Cor 1:31.

12:6 hears anything from me If the events described in 2 Cor 12:1–5 happened to Paul, then here he reveals his motivation for not speaking about this experience directly in the first person: He does not want others to view him as special or elite.

12:7 extraordinary degree of the revelations Probably refers to the exceptional number or quality of revelations that caused Paul to become prideful.

12:7 was given The use of the passive verb indicates that Paul considered God to be responsible for the thorn because it was ultimately used for good.

12:7 a thorn May refer to Paul's inner emotional turmoil about the churches (2:4), an ongoing sin, his opponents (like the so-called super-apostles; 11:1–5), a physical ailment (such as poor eyesight), his speaking ability (10:10), or demonic opposition (both in general or specific to him, as in 1 Thess 2:18). All of these options seem possible considering circumstances in Paul's life.

12:7 a messenger Since the Greek word used here is *angelos*, which may be translated as "angel," this may be a reference to an evil being. It also is possible that *angelos* references a human opponent who caused him great pain (compare 2 Cor 2:5).

12:7 of Satan By using the term *Satanas*, Paul likely has in mind the evil being that is the antithesis of God's work in the world (see 4:4). While it is unclear whether Paul associated the thorn with a human messenger or a spiritual being, he explicitly identifies it with the figure of Satan. Satan's involvement suggests that Paul may have considered the figure to function as an unwitting agent of God's discipline. Satan intends to harm Paul, but God ultimately prevails in Paul's life by displaying His power when Paul submits to the sufficiency of God's grace.

12:8 Three times Echoes the number of times Jesus asked the Father to keep Him from suffering on the cross (Mark 14:32–42). Paul emphasizes that he has pled his case before God and that God has chosen to allow this experience to continue. Paul believes God will use it for good.

12:9 grace In this context, the Greek word used here, *charis*, refers to Christ’s power to help Paul endure hardship, be strengthened when struggling (physically, mentally, or spiritually), or experience forgiveness.
12:9 power is perfected in weakness Weakness provides the opportunity for God to show His power. For this reason, Paul can boast about his weaknesses even though others may mock him (see 10:10).

12:10 whenever I am weak, then I am strong Paul restates the paradoxical nature of his life and ministry. When he is helpless and vulnerable, Christ empowers him to endure and fulfill his vocation.

12:11–13 Paul concludes his defense against the so-called super-apostles. He asserts that he has performed the signs of an apostle and reiterates that he was not a burden to the Corinthian church (vv. 12–13).

12:11 a fool See note on 11:1, and 1 Cor 11:17.

12:11 I am in no way inferior Paul listed his hardship as evidence of his “worth” as an apostle.

12:11 preeminent apostles See note on 2 Cor 11:5.

12:12 patient endurance Refers to the ability to endure hardships and persecutions in ministry (compare 6:4).

12:12 signs of an apostle The phrasing suggests that an apostle could be recognized as such by the God-given ability to perform certain miraculous signs. It also suggests the existence of a class of individuals known as “apostles” separate from the Twelve (see Acts 6:2). These signs affirm Paul’s identity in contrast with the false apostles who are causing problems at Corinth (2 Cor 11:13).

12:12 signs and wonders and deeds of power Refers to mighty deeds performed as part of God’s work of salvation. The signs and wonders that accompanied Paul’s ministry demonstrated that he was in continuity with God’s work to redeem humanity (Exod 3:20; 10:1–2; Deut 4:34; Psa 105:27–36; Acts 7:36). See 1 Cor 12:9–11.

12:13 not a burden to you See note on 2 Cor 11:9.

12:13 Forgive me this wrong Paul is either being sarcastic or merely asking for forgiveness for the sake of making peace. He did not wrong the Corinthians; he founded the church, and taught them the gospel as Jesus taught it.



I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?
2 Corinthians 12:15



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:14-21

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹⁴ Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? ¹⁶ But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. ¹⁷ Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? ¹⁸ I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? ¹⁹ Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. ²⁰ For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. ²¹ I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.



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MESSAGE NOTES



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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Despite his so-called “weaknesses” Paul hardly needs to take a backseat to the “super-apostles” the Corinthians are enamoured with (vv. 11–13). Paul loves the church more (vv. 14–18). Even this humiliating “defence” is motivated only by fear that when Paul visits he will find them still hardened and immature (vv. 19–21).

KEY VERSE

2 CORINTHIANS 12:15

Paul wanted to care for the church without cost to them.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Live with the fact that the recompense of love could be less you’re your investment of love.

DISCOVER TRUTH

How had Paul always treated the Corinthians? (12:14-15)

How did they treat Paul in return? (12:15b)

How could such self-sacrifice be rewarded with mistrust and lack of love? (12:15b)

Cross Reference: 2 Corinthians 6:11-13

What was Paul accused of and how did he respond to these allegations? (12:16-19)

2 Corinthians 12:16b

2 Corinthians 12:17

2 Corinthians 12:18

2 Corinthians 12:19b

What is Paul's greatest fear when he comes to them? (12:20-21)

2 Corinthians 12:20a

2 Corinthians 12:20b

2 Corinthians 12:21a

2 Corinthians 12:21b

WORD STUDY

What new sins and old sins does Paul describe? (12:20-21)

Old sins (12:20)

New sins (12:21)

Define each of these sins. (12:20)

quarrelling

jealousy

anger

hostility

slander

gossip

conceit

disorder

impurity

sexual immorality

sensuality

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

How would you describe Paul and the messengers' actions while among the Corinthians? (12:14-19)

What does it mean to mourn over sin?

APPLY TRUTH

What does it mean/look like for you to “spend and be spent” for the souls of others? (12:15)

EXTRA

How do you think Paul would instruct us on how to deal with a loved one who is unrepentant in their sin?

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a listen to **I Seek Not What Is Yours but You** by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/i-seek-not-what-is-yours-but-you>

COMMENTARY

12:14–21 Paul continues to emphasize that he will not receive payment from them as he prepares to visit them a third time (vv. 14–16). He claims that neither he nor his companions took advantage of them but preached Christ in order to build up the believers at Corinth (vv. 17–19).

12:14 this third time Paul first visited Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18). He refers to his second visit there as the painful visit (2 Cor 2:1).

12:14 I am not seeking your possessions The wealthy believers in Corinth wanted to become Paul’s patrons—supplying financial support to him (see v. 13). See note on 1:12; compare 1 Cor 4:15, where Paul reminds them that their relationship to him is like children to their father—the father provides for them, not the opposite.

12:16 crafty Paul sarcastically addresses their concern to provide for him (2 Cor 12:14). Paul treats that idea as absurd and insists he would not take advantage of them. See note on 11:17.

12:17 have not taken advantage Paul stands in contrast to the “false apostle” (11:20).

12:18 Titus See note on 2:13.

12:18 brother Perhaps the same individual mentioned earlier; see note on 8:18.

12:19 your edification Unlike the false apostles who mistreated the Corinthian believers (11:13–15), Paul and his associates strengthen their faith and endure hardship for their sake. See note on 10:8.

12:20 gossip, pride, disorder The sins Paul lists echo the works of the flesh he listed in Gal 5:19–21. Such vices are sins against the community and create division among believers.

12:21 sexual immorality Paul addressed the issue of sexual immorality among the Corinthians in his previous letter. Compare 1 Cor 5:1–13.



For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

2 Corinthians 13:4



READ SCRIPTURE

Take the time to repeatedly read and meditate on the passage daily, across the week, using at least two different versions of the Bible.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:1-14

ESV – English Standard Version

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹ This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ² I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— ³ since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴ For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! ⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. ⁷ But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. ¹⁰ For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

¹¹ Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints greet you.

¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.



LISTEN TO THE MESSAGE

Listen and take notes from the Sunday morning message or listen online to the recorded sermon. You can also access summative notes on our website.

<http://www.kingstoncommunitychurch.com/recordings>

<http://www.kingstoncommunitychurch.com/latest-news>

MESSAGE NOTES



COMPLETE THE STUDY GUIDE

Take your time across the week to work through the following study guide questions. Be prayerful as you seek truth in and through the Word. Jot down any questions or additional observations you make so you can share them with your small group.

OVERVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Paul concludes with a warning. Apostolic authority is real. Christ is speaking through Paul. If they do not respond to Christ, the Lord, who is “powerful among you,” will Himself discipline them (13:1–4). The believers must examine themselves now. If not, when Paul comes, punishment will surely follow (vv. 5–10). His appeal uttered, the apostle says a very brief “good-bye” (vv. 11–14).

KEY VERSE

2 CORINTHIANS 13:4

The cross exhibited the weakness of Christ in His humanity

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Just as Christ was weak, so we are to be willing to be weak; just as Christ is strong, so in him we are strong.

DISCOVER TRUTH

Why must every charge against Paul be established by two or three witnesses? (13:1)

Cross Reference: Deuteronomy 19:15-21

What evidence of Pauls apostolic authority was Paul intending to give them? (13:2-3)

Instead of looking for proofs of Paul's apostleship, what should they be looking for? (13:5-6)

What are the three great blessings, from the three Divine sources, which Paul seeks for the Corinthians? (13:14)

WORD STUDY

How were Paul's and Christ's ways similar? (13:3-4)

What five instructions does Paul give in closing? (13:11-12)

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

Which is more important, a teacher's reputation or the well-being of the church? (13:8-10)

Paul instructs the Corinthians to examine and test themselves to see if they are in the faith. What does this mean?

Why do you think this is important?

What criteria should they use?

APPLY TRUTH

Examine and test yourself to see if you are in the faith. What do you find?

EXTRA

Why do you think Paul gives the exhortation to rejoice? (13:11)

ENGAGE WITH GOD

PRAISE – Meditate on what has been revealed about God’s attributes and praise Him for who He is.

THANKSGIVING – Thank God for what He has done, both in and through this passage.

INTERCESSION – Who are you led to pray for as you have studied?

CONFESSION – What do you need to confess and repent to God?

PETITION – What are you wanting to ask God?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING

Have a read of **Self-Examination Speaks a Thousand Lies** by Jared Mellinger

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/self-examination-speaks-a-thousand-lies>

COMMENTARY

13:1–10 Paul concludes his letter by encouraging the Corinthians to examine themselves (2 Cor 13:5). He warns them that he will not spare anyone when he visits again (v. 2) but hopes that he will not have to act severely (v. 10).

13:1 two or three witnesses Paul quotes Deut 19:5 to establish a process for dealing with his opponents' accusations against him. Multiple witnesses were required to prevent false witnesses (see Deut 17:6). Jesus also applied this model for use in church discipline (Matt 18:16; see 1 Tim 5:19 and note).

13:2 I will not spare Paul will not tolerate rebellion against his apostolic authority; he may even expel such opponents from the church community.

13:3 is speaking in me In the OT, a prophet functioned as a messenger for God. Paul describes himself as one through whom Christ speaks.

13:4 crucified because of weakness Paul returns to the themes of life and death (2 Cor 2:16; 4:7–14; 5:1–10). The cross exhibited the weakness of Christ in His humanity, revealing that He was susceptible to death even as the Son of God.

13:4 weak in him Paul acknowledges the Corinthians' perception that he is weak, stating that he patterns his life after Christ. Just as Christ was weak (by people's standards), so Paul is willing to be weak (1 Cor 2:3); just as Christ is strong (by God's standards), so Paul is strong.

13:5 Examine yourselves While Paul's opponents wish to test him, he urges them to examine themselves. If they reject his apostolic authority and instruction, they also reject Christ. If they do not repent, they may prove not to be believers at all. Since Paul's words and authority come from God, he can make such claims.

13:7 wrong Refers to the refusal to repent from sin, especially the rejection of Paul's authority (2 Cor 12:20–21); it may also refer to the refusal to show respect and hospitality to believers involved in the collection project (see note on 8:4).

13:8 truth The Greek word used here, *alētheias*, likely refers to the gospel message. Earlier, Paul affirmed that he openly proclaimed the truth (4:2). This is in contrast to Paul’s opponents, who distorted God’s Word and proclaimed a different gospel (see 11:4 and note).

13:9 we are weak, but you are strong Paul reminds the Corinthians about the paradoxical nature of his ministry: His vocation as an apostle requires that he endure hardship for the sake of other believers and so that more people can come to Christ (Acts 9:15–16; 2 Cor 11:23–29).

13:9 your maturity Paul wishes the Corinthians would have the same perspective as him—that they would understand his ministry, his authority, and the nature of the church (all of which find their source in Christ). Believers must evaluate others from God’s point of view (see 5:16 and note).

13:10 the Lord has given me Paul did not appoint himself as an apostle; Jesus Christ gave him authority and called him to apostleship.

13:10 building up To strengthen people in their faith so that they grow in maturity in Christ.

13:11–13 As he closes his letter, Paul expresses his desire for the Corinthian believers to be united. He encourages them to seek restoration, comfort one another, and live in peace. He concludes with a benediction.

13:11 be in agreement Paul urges the believers to have the same mindset and purpose. This does not mean that they will agree on everything, but they must live in harmony with each other (see 1 Cor 1:10; Phil 4:2).

13:11 be at peace To live in harmonious relationship with one another.

13:12 holy kiss Paul often concludes his letters with this greeting (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20). See 1 Thess 5:26.

13:13 Paul concludes with a benediction that mentions the three members of the Trinity. The terms Paul uses—“grace,” “love,” and “fellowship”—emphasize his concern for reconciliation with God (2 Cor 5:20) and unity among believers (8:4). Paul also refers to the Trinity when he discusses spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians (see 1 Cor 12:4–11 and note).



But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

One of the major themes of 2 Corinthians revolves around humility and weakness. Paul insisted that he came not in status or strength but weakness instead. This would have been hugely counter-cultural and was intended to teach a city enamoured with status. One historian commented that Corinth was a place of unbridled ambition. Reflecting upon the Corinthian world, a man was forced to ask, "What created a city like this? What kind of people created such a city?" His answer: people "impressed with material splendour and intent on raising their standing in the world." In this society one can only rise via a "combination of patronage, marriage, wealth, and patient cultivation of connections."

This paradox of strength through weakness runs deeply through all of Jesus' and Paul's ministries. It has been the focused of the Bible Study series. We trust you have and continue to find great strength in emptying yourself. You will find your life when you lose it.

REFLECT ON THE TRUTH

How would you summarise the message of 2 Corinthians in one sentence?

As you reflect on 2 Corinthians as a whole, what implications do you see for your life?

What have you learned in 2 Corinthians that might lead you to praise God, turn away from sin, and trust more firmly in his strength and provision?

