

DIGGING DEEPER  
2 CORINTHIANS





Digging  
Deeper  
2 Corinthians

Study Guide

# Acknowledgments

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# Table of Contents

## 2 CORINTHIANS *Verse By Verse*

| Lesson | Page |
|--------|------|
| 1      | 2    |
| 2      | 19   |
| 3      | 28   |
| 4      | 38   |
| 5      | 46   |
| 6      | 59   |
| 7      | 71   |
| 8      | 78   |
| 9      | 89   |
| 10     | 97   |
| 11     | 106  |
| 12     | 122  |
| 13     | 136  |

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## **LESSON 1**

### **2 Corinthians 1:1–2:4**

#### **PAUL’S GREETINGS–1:1-2**

Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Corinth from Macedonia. He had suffered great persecution in Asia Minor, and he was on the way to visit the Corinthians. He was traveling through both Macedonia in the north and Achaia in the south to collect a donation for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Paul sent this letter on ahead to tell the Corinthians how they should handle some of the problems that were plaguing them; he especially focused on the problem of the false teachers who had infiltrated the church.

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:1.**

- Paul identified himself as “*an apostle*.” It was appropriate for Paul to mention his apostleship here because his authority is a major theme of this letter. A group of false apostles (11:13) had infiltrated the Corinthian church. This concerned Paul greatly because he had founded the church on his second missionary journey. To gain a foothold in Corinth, these false apostles had discredited Paul’s missionary work. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to defend his apostolic authority and to refute the false teachers and their accusations.
- An “apostle” was a sent one, who was “sent forth” by Christ Jesus with the mission to make disciples in His name (**Matthew 28:18-20**). The twelve disciples, who followed Jesus during his earthly ministry, learning from him, and witnessing his miracles became the apostles. However, Paul was also included among the apostles because Jesus Himself had sent Paul to preach the Good News to the Gentiles. Although Paul had

been a zealous Pharisee who persecuted Christians, Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road, calling him to a radically different life. Paul was an apostle by the will of God because God Himself chose him for that work (**Acts 9:15**). This vision of Christ changed Paul forever, making him not only a devoted follower of Christ but also an apostle sent by Christ to make disciples among the Gentiles. Paul's apostleship was confirmed by the apostles in Jerusalem (**Acts 9:28**), and his message was confirmed at the Council of Jerusalem (**Acts 15:1-21**).

- ***“And Timothy our brother.”*** Timothy was Paul's assistant. He had grown up in Lystra, a city in the province of Galatia. Paul had visited Galatia on his first missionary journey (**Acts 14:8-21**). During that trip, he apparently met Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (**2 Timothy 1:5**). On his second visit to Lystra, Paul asked young Timothy to travel with him (**Acts 16:1-5**). Although Paul had other helpers such as Titus, he developed a special relationship with Timothy, calling him a son in Christ (**Philippians 2:22**).
- ***“To the church of God which is at Corinth.”*** Paul founded the Corinthian church around A.D. 50 on his second missionary journey. The core of this church was a group of Gentiles who would gather the house of Titius Justus to hear Paul preach.
- ***“With all the saints who are in all Achaia.”*** In the first century, the southern portion of Greece was called *Achaia*; it was a province of the Roman Empire. The northern portion of Greece was governed separately and was called Macedonia.
- Paul addressed this letter to all the Christians in Achaia because he viewed Corinth as the center of Christianity for that province. Most likely, Christians throughout

Achaia were aware of the situation in the Corinthian church. By addressing this letter to all the Achaiaans, Paul would make it clear to every Christian in that region what his stance was with respect to the controversial issues in the Corinthian church.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 1:2.**

- This was the standard greeting Paul used in all of his letters from Romans to Philemon. It was a Christian adaptation of the common letter-writing practice of his day. After identifying to whom a letter was addressed, a writer would give a “greeting.” Paul Christianized this common greeting by using the Greek word *charis*, commonly translated “grace.” Grace is God’s undeserved favor.
- The Greek word for “peace” is based on the common Hebrew greeting *shalom*. For Jews, *shalom* did not mean absence of conflict. Instead, *shalom* connotes well-being, wholeness, and inner tranquility.
- By identifying “***God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ***” together, Paul was communicating that both the Father and the Son had granted these wonderful gifts of grace and peace.

## **WE PASS ON GOD’S COMFORT TO OTHERS—1:3-11**

Paul would typically begin a letter by thanking God for the believers to whom he was writing. In his letter to the Romans, he praised the Romans for their faith (**Romans 1:8-9**). In Ephesians, he praised the Ephesians for their love for others (**Ephesians 1:15**). The Thessalonians were praised for their faithful work and their hope in Jesus’ second coming. The Colossians were praised for their trust

in Jesus (**Colossians 1:3**), and in 1 Corinthians, Paul praised God for giving the Corinthians spiritual gifts of eloquence and knowledge. But in 2 Corinthians, Paul had no praise for the Corinthians; however, he did have words of encouragement.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:3.**

- This section began with a common phrase of the day. “***Blessed be the God***” was a declaration of praise used by the worshipers of the Old Testament and a phrase that typically began worship services in synagogues (**Psalm 66:20; 68:35**). The exact expression appears at the beginning of one of Peter’s letters (**1 Peter 1:3**).
- Worship and praise were owed only to the God who had sent Jesus to die on the cross for our salvation. Paul used the Greek word for “Lord,” which means “master” or “owner,” with the name “Jesus,” to express Jesus’ complete authority over believers. “Christ,” on the other hand, was the Greek word for “Messiah.” Thus, with the phrase “Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul was identifying Jesus as both his Master and the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. God was the Father of Jesus in the sense that Jesus had come from God the Father, not that Jesus had been created by God the Father.
- “***The Father of mercies.***” Paul had dramatically experienced God’s mercy in his travels through Asia. He was introducing his testimony of God’s compassionate character in his own life with a worship phrase that many of the Corinthians would have known.
- “***And God of all comfort.***” Many translations use the word “comfort” for the Greek word *paraklesis* here, but the Greek word is closer to “encouragement.” The word does not imply that God rescues His people from every discomfort but that He gives them the tools, the

necessary training, and the essential guidance to endure the problems of this life. That is why Jesus used this word, the *Paraclete*, for the Holy Spirit (**John 14:16**). The Holy Spirit is the “Encourager.”

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:4.**

- Paul had a rather difficult letter to write to the Corinthian church which had gone through a lot of internal dissension. Instead of focusing on these persistent problems, Paul began his letter by focusing on God and His comfort/encouragement. When the troubles passed and the Corinthians emerged faithful, then they would be able to encourage others who needed the same encouragement.
- For Paul, times of trials and difficulty were not a time to despair (1:8-10; 4:7-12; 11:23-29). Instead, they were to be seen as opportunities to reveal the flesh and to experience God’s grace, mercy, and love. Trials are never easy, but it is through trials that God will shape and mold our character. Often, it is only through trials that we learn about God’s loving care for us.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:5.**

- Jesus had warned His disciples that they could expect suffering: “‘*A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*’” (**John 15:20**). His warning was an appropriate one because the early church experienced strong opposition and persecution. The first Christian martyr was Stephen (**Acts 7:57-60**), commencing a long list of martyrs for the Christian faith (**Acts 12:2; Revelation 7:14-17**).
- Although he had been a traveling evangelist for less than a decade, Paul had already experienced much

hardship and suffering for the cause of Christ. He had been insulted (**Acts 13:45**); chased out of towns, villages, and cities by angry mobs (**Acts 17:8-10**); beaten and thrown into prisons (**Acts 16:22-23**); stoned and left for dead (**Acts 14:19-20**); as well as the object of murderous plots (**Acts 14:5**).

- It was clear to Paul that God doesn't protect his people from suffering. Instead, He allows them to experience ridicule, rejection, and abuse.
- Paul had a radically different view of suffering; trials and discomfort associated with the Christian life is God's way of allowing Christians to become more like Jesus—to suffer just as Jesus suffered (**Philippians 1:29; 3:10**). Peter agreed with Paul: Christians should rejoice when they suffer, for in their own suffering they will in some small way experience what it meant for Jesus to suffer for their sins (**1 Peter 4:12-13**). **Philippians 3:10** speaks of the fellowship of His suffering.
- Suffering also helps believers grow in their faith. God uses suffering to shape His children into Christ-likeness. Suffering should be thought of as the necessary pain that accompanies spiritual growth. In Romans, Paul noted that suffering produces perseverance, which, in turn, produces Christian character (**Romans 5:3-4; James 1:3-4; 2 Peter 1:6; Revelation 2:2, 19**). This passage highlights another benefit to suffering: It teaches the sufferer how to encourage others who are also suffering (1:6-7).
- Understanding these truths about suffering can help believers look beyond their difficult situations to the ultimate goal: molding us into the image of Christ. This doesn't make the sufferings, trials, and difficulties any easier. But it does encourage God's people to endure those difficult times. God has a good purpose for pain and suffering; and He works out that good purpose in

believers' lives (**Romans 8:28**), giving them enough comfort in order to persevere through any hardship.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:6.**

- Paul was explaining to the Corinthians why he was recounting his suffering and trials in Asia. He was emphasizing that the church was not composed of individuals but was a body with its members thoroughly interrelated. Paul had already taught the Corinthians: “***If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it***” (**1 Corinthians 12:26**). Paul and his fellow travelers had experienced many troubles, but this resulted in the Corinthians' benefit and salvation. Paul and his fellow travelers had also been comforted by God; therefore, they were an encouragement to the Corinthians.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:7.**

- Despite all the problems the Corinthians had experienced, from division in the church to shocking cases of immorality, Paul expressed his complete and unshakable confidence in them: “***our hope for you is steadfast***.” He knew the Corinthian church was struggling and suffering, but his confident hope was that their steadfastness to the truth and their perseverance through difficulties which comes from dependent faith in Him would enable them to enjoy God's encouragement and strength.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:8.**

- Next, Paul moved from the general principle that God encourages Christians in their trials to his particular

situation. He didn't explain to the Corinthians the details about what happened to him in Asia, only that it involved despairing of life.

- He was burdened beyond measure, just like a ship weighted down to the point of sinking. Paul's despair was real. He was dealing with a profound depression.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:9.**

- Paul must have been picturing himself in this passage as a humble petitioner for his life. The answer he received as he contemplated his situation was death. There was no hope. No person could save him. Paul's only hope was in God.
- But Paul's hope was well placed—only God raises the dead. God's power to rise from the dead was a teaching that some of the Corinthians doubted (**1 Corinthians 15:1-56**). In 2 Corinthians, Paul repeatedly emphasized the temporary nature of human existence (4:16; 5:1) in order to highlight the importance of the Christian hope in eternal life. Without a confident hope in the resurrection, the Christian faith would be useless (**1 Corinthians 15:14**).
- Paul wrote that any amount of suffering is worth enduring, for suffering makes God's people realize that God is the only One on whom they can rely.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:10.**

- Paul's hope in God was vindicated. God, who holds the ultimate power over life and death, had rescued him. The same God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead delivered Paul from mortal danger. God had not only protected Paul from death, but he had also given Paul the grace to endure this very difficult situation.

- The Lord's deliverance of Paul during this life-threatening time gave Paul the assurance to believe that God had been planning his rescue from the beginning and would continue to deliver him in the future.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 1:11.**

- Often Paul would ask churches to pray for him (**Romans 15:30-32; Ephesians 6:18-20**).
- Paul thanked the Corinthians for praying for him. In Greek, Paul literally wrote that the Corinthians were working together to support him in prayer.
- Just as in verse 7, this verse highlights the interdependence of the members of the church with each other (**1 Corinthians 12:12-30**). Because God had delivered him, Paul could encourage the Corinthians to give thanks to God because their prayers for the safety of Paul and his companions had been answered. The Corinthians' praise would inspire many others and teach them of God's faithfulness.

## **PAUL'S DEFENSE—1:12–2:4**

Some false teachers had infiltrated the church at Corinth and attempted to discredit Paul's authority. This had caused the church to divide into factions that supported one teacher over another (**1 Corinthians 3:1-23**). In addition to these divisions, these false teachers had begun to attack Paul's character. They questioned his authority as an apostle, giving a variety of reasons, including his lack of eloquence, his refusal to accept financial support, and even some of the setbacks and trials he had endured as an evangelist. After spending much of the first chapter of 2 Corinthians highlighting how he and the Corinthians were intimate

coworkers for the cause of Jesus, Paul dove into a full defense of his own sincerity.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 1:12.**

- Second Corinthians speaks more of boasting than any of Paul's other letters (1:12, 14; 10:8, 13, 16-17; 11:12, 18, 21, 30; 12:5-6, 9) because Paul had to counter the boasts of his opponents in Corinth. Essentially, the Greek word for "boast" means "confidence." Sometimes Paul would use the word in a negative sense to describe those who placed confidence in their own abilities (11:12). At other times, Paul used the word for a well-placed confidence, or hope, in God and the power God freely gives to all Christians (10:17). In this way, Paul could boast in God because it ultimately brought glory to the Lord.
- Paul may have spoken of his conscience here because it was a term frequently used by the Corinthians. Paul made it clear that even his conscience was judged by God (**1 Corinthians 4:4-5**). In the end, a person's conscience will not justify him or her before the Almighty. God, and God alone, will judge each person's actions.
- ***"We conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity."*** Paul did not want to bring reproach on the gospel with his behavior. For this reason, he was extremely careful to always be sincere, as he acted in a way that was beyond criticism. In this way, he would draw attention to Christ instead of to his own behavior.
- ***"...not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you."*** In addition to his conduct, Paul pointed to the reason for his good behavior and the source of his teaching: It did not come from worldly wisdom, but from God's grace.

- In other words, Paul wasn't relying on his own wisdom and knowledge when he visited Corinth with the truth of the gospel. Instead, he was relying on God's enabling power.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:13-14.**

- Paul was saying that he didn't write anything the Corinthians couldn't understand. Apparently, the Corinthians were questioning Paul's sincerity. Some in the church were claiming he wrote one thing and then said another (10:9-10). Here Paul defended his sincerity, especially his honesty in his previous letters.
- If the Corinthians were not convinced of his genuine intentions, Paul could only hope—confidently expect—that his sincere intentions would be revealed on the day of the Lord Jesus (the day Jesus will come back to this earth). The Old Testament prophets referred to this day as “the day of the Lord” (**Isaiah 13:6; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18**). On that day, Paul expected that his actions and words would be shown for what they were: blameless and true, and the genuineness of the Corinthians' faith would be a matter of great joy for Paul as well.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:15-16.**

- Paul had based his travel plans on his confidence that the Corinthians were encouraged by him, just as he was by them (1:14). He had made a quick, unscheduled visit to Corinth. But when he had arrived, he had found quite a different atmosphere at that church. At least a portion of its members had rejected him and questioned his authority. Paul would later call this a “painful visit,” one that caused a breach in the Corinthians' intimate relationship with him (2:1). This “painful visit” was

brief because Paul was hurrying to visit the churches in Macedonia. However, he did promise to stop by Corinth on the way back.

- It's interesting to note that Paul changed his travel plans, and rather than visiting Corinth on the way back, he wrote a letter instead (2:3-4; 7:8). He believed that another visit would only make matters worse.
- The fact that Paul first made an unscheduled visit and then canceled his second scheduled visit to Corinth gave his opponents another reason to criticize him. He had not come through on his promises. Subsequently, in 2 Corinthians, Paul spent much of the letter defending his honesty to the Corinthians (1:12).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:17.**

- Paul's change of plans had given his accusers at Corinth reason to complain about his conduct, and even to criticize his authority. By criticizing him for his erratic travel plans, Paul's opponents were implying that he couldn't be trusted. If Paul couldn't be trusted, then how could they believe his message?
- The word "lightly" refers to a person who makes promises that he or she doesn't intend to keep—a person who is fundamentally untrustworthy.
- Paul's opponents at Corinth had labeled his actions as being motivated by the world's standards. This accusation was in direct contradiction to Paul's own claim in 1 Corinthians that his preaching was not from himself or any other human authority but from the Spirit of God (**1 Corinthians 2:4**). Labeling his actions as coming from worldly reasoning was a direct assault on Paul's spiritual authority. These serious accusations circulating in Corinth were the reason why Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. In essence, this letter is a passionate

defense of Paul's apostolic authority and the truth of his message.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:18-19.**

- Instead of answering his opponents' criticisms and defending himself, Paul reminded the Corinthians of God's faithfulness. There would be no wavering between "yes" and "no" with God. Jesus was completely faithful in His ministry, fulfilling every promise God had made.
- After reminding the Corinthians of Jesus' faithfulness in everything, Paul employed a common line of argument in the first century, an argument from the greater to the lesser. If Jesus had proved Himself faithful, then Jesus' appointed messengers, Paul, Timothy, and Silas, would certainly be faithful and trustworthy.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:20.**

- This verse emphasizes Paul's point: Christ has fulfilled all of God's promises. His earthly ministry is an example of God's faithfulness to his people. God had promised He would provide a Savior, and He did. Christ said "yes" to God and His great promises.
- Paul made it clear that his own integrity stood on Christ's integrity because his message was consistently Christ's gospel.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.**

- In these two verses, Paul described how he, his coworkers, Timothy, and Silas, and the Corinthians themselves were all tied together. They had all received

God's Spirit, evidence that they all belonged to God through Christ.

- These verses use four key terms to describe how God made them all part of his family.
  - The first term “***establishes us***” is derived from legal terminology meaning to guarantee a sale. Here Paul used the word to express that it is God Himself who guarantees the salvation of those who believe in Jesus.
- The next three terms are found in these words: “***[He who] anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.***”
  - The second word “***anointed***” was derived from an Old Testament concept. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed to signify their commission to be representatives of God to the Israelites (**Exodus 28:41; 1 Samuel 15:1; 1 Kings 19:16**). Here Paul used the word “***anointed***” to speak of the anointing of God's Spirit.
  - The third word Paul used is “***seal***.” A first-century seal was similar to the present-day brand that is burned on the hide of an animal. The brand identifies the owner of the animal. Paul used this image of a seal or brand for Christians also. God Himself has sealed, or stamped, on us His mark of ownership when He gave us His Spirit to live in us.
  - Paul used another legal term of his day: “***guarantee***” or “***deposit***.” The Greek word for “deposit” refers to the down payment that a buyer will give a seller to declare the intent of paying the full amount. Here and in **Ephesians 1:14**, Paul used this word to refer to the Holy Spirit. God gives His Spirit to His children as a down payment. It is only a foretaste of the glorious joy they will experience in heaven, the full payment that God has promised.

- With these four key terms, Paul makes it clear to whom he and the Corinthians belong. They are owned by God, who has not only placed the down payment of his own Spirit in their hearts but also has guaranteed, sealed, and anointed them in Christ.

## Read 2 Corinthians 1:23-24.

- Paul had planned to visit the Corinthians twice (1:15-16). But after experiencing the opposition from some of them on his last “painful visit” (2:1), he decided to write a letter to give them time to change their ways (7:8-9). Paul wanted to visit them at a time when he could encourage them in their faith.
- The phrase “***I call God as my witness***” was used by Paul to subpoena God as his witness. Since no other person could testify to his motives, Paul was appealing to God as a witness to his innocence. In a number of his New Testament letters, Paul called on God as witness to his intentions (**Romans 1:9; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:5, 10**). Paul saw his whole life, including his innermost thoughts, as an open book to God.
- Paul wanted to make it clear that his decision to cancel his second visit to Corinth had been made out of consideration for the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians. His motive had been to spare the Corinthians the sorrow that another visit would produce.
- “***Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.***” Paul carefully described his role as an apostle as working with the Corinthians for their ultimate joy in Christ. It could only be in Christ because it would only be by faith in Him that they could stand firm. Paul

wasn't their taskmaster; instead, he was a fellow worker pointing out how they could experience the joy of the Lord.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 2:1-2.**

- Paul didn't recount exactly what had happened on this painful visit in this letter. That would have been inappropriate since Paul had already addressed it previously (2:3). But this letter gives some clues to what happened. From the two letters that have been preserved (1 and 2 Corinthians), we know that the Corinthians not only had problems with incest (**1 Corinthians 5:1-2**) and adultery (**1 Corinthians 6:9**), but they were also troubled by incessant arguing (**1 Corinthians 1:10**), disruptions during the worship service (**1 Corinthians 11:17-22**), and even lawsuits between believers (**1 Corinthians 6:1-8**). Moreover, a group of false teachers were preoccupied with criticizing Paul's actions and authority (11:1-11).
- *“For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?”* Many of Paul's letters describe the joy and encouragement he had received from other Christians—from the Romans (**Romans 15:32**), the Philippians (**Philippians 1:25**), and the Thessalonians (**1 Thessalonians 2:19**). The steadfast faith of these Christians encouraged Paul to continue on. Later in this letter, Paul would describe how Titus's promising report of the Corinthians' faith encouraged him to endure persecution (7:4, 7).

## **Read 2 Corinthians 2:3.**

- This verse makes it clear that Paul received much joy from the spiritual condition of the believers. The first part of 2 Corinthians emphasizes the interdependence of Paul and the Corinthians—the community of the faith that existed between them (1:11-14).
- The interdependence of Christians was a truth Paul had already communicated to the Corinthians (**1 Corinthians 12:12-29**). Christians together form one spiritual body in Christ. As all part of one body, believers work together in unity to edify or build up the body in love (**Ephesians 4:16**). Each member has a role in the body according to the spiritual gift God has given that person. Paul stressed this truth again and again. In Ephesians, Paul underscores the unity of Gentiles and Israelites in Christ (**Ephesians 3:6**). In Romans, Paul encourages each Christian to enthusiastically use his or her unique spiritual gift for the benefit of the entire church (**Romans 12:4-8**). In Colossians, he encourages all to pursue peace with one another since they are all part of the same body (**Colossians 3:15**).

## Read 2 Corinthians 2:4.

- Paul passionately expressed how he felt when he wrote that “severe letter.” Although he was sorry that his letter would hurt the Corinthians, he had sent it anyway. In 7:8-12, Paul explains that his severe reprimand in the letter was aimed at securing a change of heart in the Corinthian believers. He knew it would cause much sorrow; but out of his love for these folks, he was hoping that it would provoke “godly sorrow” (7:10), a sorrow that leads to repentance (a changed mind).

## **LESSON 2**

### **2 Corinthians 2:5-17**

#### **REINSTATE THE REPENTANT SINNER**

Paul doesn't name the offender who had caused the trouble the last time he was in Corinth, but he does instruct the church on how to handle this individual. As this letter will explain later, the Corinthians had accepted Paul's previous instructions in the letter he had written with tears (2:1-4; 7:8-10). Truly sorry for their initial mismanagement of the unfortunate event, they had punished the offender.

Paul was now concerned for the offender's spiritual welfare. Although the primary purpose of 2 Corinthians is to reassert Paul's apostolic authority in the face of mounting criticism, Paul didn't want the spiritual condition of anyone in the church to be jeopardized, even if it was the man who had offended him personally (2:5). He explained that it was time to forgive the man. The repentant offender needed forgiveness, acceptance, and comfort. Paul was concerned that undue severity would give Satan a foothold in the church by permanently separating the man from the congregation of believers. Church discipline should always seek the restoration of the offender. Two mistakes in church discipline should be avoided: being too lenient by not correcting mistakes and being too harsh by not forgiving the sinner. There is a time to confront and a time to comfort.

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 2:5.**

- These verses emphasize that the reason Paul was concerned about this man's offense was not to correct the injury Paul had suffered. If that had been the case, then Paul might take his own instructions to heart and

simply ignore the injustice (1 **Corinthians 6:7**). Instead, Paul's point is that the whole church ("*all of you*") had suffered because of this individual.

- Most likely, the offender's actions had amounted to a direct attack on Paul's apostolic authority. Paul would perceive this not only as an attack on his authority but also an insult to the entire church, which had been founded on the gospel message that Paul had delivered to them. If Paul were untrustworthy, then his message couldn't be trusted either.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 2:6.**

- Paul's stern letter had produced the desired effect. The Corinthians had realized that tolerating this man and his sin would ruin the church. They couldn't function as the holy people of God with such a rebel among them.
- The believers in the church were united in judgment against this man. This united front showed the man the seriousness of his sin and, no doubt, helped lead him to repentance (a changed mind).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 2:7-8.**

- Evidently, the reproof the Corinthians had meted out was sufficient, and the unnamed offender had realized the seriousness of his actions. Now Paul was concerned that the Corinthians forgive and console the offender. He did not want the offender to be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Paul was concerned for the offender's spiritual welfare.
- Just as on his last visit, Paul had passionately urged the Corinthians to punish the offender (13:2); here he encouraged the Corinthians to reaffirm their love for

the offender. The intent of church discipline should be to bring a person to a deeper relationship with Christ, not punishment.

- In this situation, the discipline had promoted genuine repentance. Thus, the Corinthians were to restore the man who was being disciplined, showing him genuine Christian love. Paul doesn't quote Jesus on this matter, but he was, in effect, following Jesus' own instructions: "*If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him*" (Luke 17:3).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 2:9.**

- Paul explained his reason for writing the "severe letter" to the Corinthians. First of all, he had hoped the letter would correct the troublesome situation before he arrived (2:3). When he visited them, he wanted to be an encouragement and to test their sincerity in the faith.
- As Paul explained to the Romans, God had assigned him the apostolic task of calling people to obedience, which is a fruit of faith in Christ (**Romans 1:5**). Paul had been empowered by Christ with apostolic authority (10:4-6). But Paul's authority didn't involve commanding obedience to himself but rather to Christ.
- Titus's report from Corinth revealed that they had listened to Paul's rebuke and had heeded his instructions. Their teachableness in these matters caused Paul to rejoice (7:13-16).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 2:10.**

- For Paul, forgiveness was a major issue for Christians. Out of His own free will, God forgives those who believe in His Son (**Romans 3:24; 5:15**). It is only through God's grace, that is, His undeserved favor, that

anyone is saved at all (**Ephesians 2:5, 8**). So the Corinthians' forgiveness of the offender among them was fundamentally based on Christ's forgiveness of them (**Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13**).

- This verse downplays Paul's part in the entire incident. Paul didn't want to imply that he was governing the Corinthians' faith (1:24). Hence, he phrased the pronouncement of forgiveness in the opposite way as would be expected. Since the offense was primarily directed against Paul (2:5), one would think that he should have been the first to pronounce forgiveness. Instead, he emphasized that it was the Corinthians who should forgive. He would merely agree with their verdict. Paul even suggested that he had nothing to forgive. In this way, he was emphasizing the point that the offense had been against the entire church, not merely himself.
- The Greek phrase for "*in the presence of Christ*" is literally "in the face of Christ." Paul was making the point that all of the deliberations of the church were in Christ's presence. Jesus saw everything, even the motives and thoughts of every person. In downplaying his own authority in this situation, Paul was pointing to the ultimate authority: Christ Himself. It was before Christ that the church would forgive the offender, and it was before Christ that Paul, hundreds of miles away, would forgive the same offender.
- "*Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.*" C. S. Lewis

## **Read 2 Corinthians 2:11.**

- Paul spoke of Satan more in his letters to the Corinthians than in any other of his New Testament letters. Second Corinthians clearly identifies the "false

apostles” in the Corinthian church with the clever deceptions of Satan (11:14).

- In their zeal to purge the church from sin, the Corinthians were punishing the offender without keeping in mind the purpose of discipline: to inspire a changed life and promote reconciliation to God. Under Satan’s influence, the offender’s sorrow could easily be turned into resentment (2:7) instead of repentance (see Paul’s comparison of godly sorrow with worldly sorrow in 7:10). Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to guard against such a tragic outcome.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 2:12.**

- In Troas, Paul had an opportunity to preach the gospel of Christ. The word *gospel* means “good news,” and Paul used the word sixty times in his New Testament letters. Paul summarized his life mission as the task of preaching the gospel to Gentiles (**Galatians 1:11-16; 2 Timothy 1:10**). Paul traveled all over the Mediterranean world, preaching the gospel in every city where he found an opportunity. Apparently, he had found such an open opportunity in Troas.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 2:13.**

- This is the first time Paul mentioned the role of Titus in the complex relationship between Paul and the Corinthians. As it becomes clear in this letter, Titus played a crucial part in reconciling the two (2:13; 7:6, 13-14; 8:6, 16-17, 23; 12:18). Titus was a Greek convert whom Paul greatly loved and wholeheartedly trusted (**Galatians 2:3**). Titus most likely had come to faith in Christ through Paul’s ministry. Paul and Titus enjoyed a special relationship as Paul referred to Titus

as “a true son” (**Titus 1:4**) and a “partner” in Paul’s work (8:23).

- Paul had searched for Titus, hoping to meet him in Troas and receive news about the Corinthian church. When he did not find Titus in Troas, Paul went on to Macedonia where he did find him.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 2:14.**

- In a Roman triumphal procession, a Roman general would drive his captives and the spoils of war before him down the main thoroughfare of Rome. He would be greeted by the loud cheers of Roman citizens, and a cloud of incense would be burned for the gods as they paraded to the temple of Jupiter. To the Romans, the aroma was the sweet smell of victory.
- The general meaning of this verse is that Christ will eventually triumph over all evil. No opponent, setback, or weakness can stop Christ’s victory. It has already been accomplished on the cross. The triumphal procession of Christ is on its way.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 2:15-16.**

- Paul’s Jewish readers, steeped in Old Testament language, would immediately recognize Paul’s language as being similar to **Leviticus 23:18** where the burnt offerings are said to be “*an aroma pleasing to the Lord.*”
- Unlike in the Old Testament, where physical smells were presented to God, Paul told the Corinthians that the holy lives of Christians please God the most (**Romans 12:1**), not the thoughtless animal sacrifices found in the Old Testament.

- ***“To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.”*** Through Christians the precious aroma of God’s grace is spread throughout the world. When Christians preach the gospel message, it is good news to some (a fragrance from life to life) and bad news to others (a fragrance from death to death). Those who are being drawn by the Spirit immediately recognize the life-giving power of the message. Those who do not believe, however, smell something foul; the judgment of death that awaits them.
- Paul painted a stark contrast. There is no middle ground. There is the pathway to life and the pathway to death. Although the paths may appear to be parallel, the farther one walks on the path leading to death, the farther one deviates from the goodness, truth, and love that characterize the path of life. This is a consistent theme of Scripture. Jesus presented the same stark contrast: ***“Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. But narrow is the gate and difficult the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”*** (Matthew 7:13-14). Moses spoke of the same contrast to the Israelites: ***“I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live”*** (Deuteronomy 30:19).
- ***“And who is sufficient for these things?”*** Apparently, some of the preachers and teachers in Corinth had been boasting of their competence in spiritual matters and slandering Paul. Chapter 11 of this letter is a full-scale defense of Paul’s apostolic authority against these opponents.
- The answer to the rhetorical question posed here is not entirely clear. However, the implied answer may be that no one is competent or sufficient for the task. God was

the One who commissioned Paul (**Acts 9:1-22**) and empowered him to be an ambassador to the Gentiles (**Galatians 2:7; Ephesians 3:8**); he made Paul competent for the task of preaching the gospel (3:5; **1 Corinthians 15:10**). In the same way, all believers can ready ourselves for our God-given tasks by relying on God's enabling power instead of our own competence. Serving Christ requires focusing on what Jesus has done and is doing in and through us, not what we can do for Him.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 2:17.**

- After questioning whether anyone is adequate for the task of preaching the gospel, Paul indirectly criticized his opponents at Corinth for being peddlers of God's Word.
- This criticism is in response to Paul's critics who had spoken against Paul's ministry in Corinth because he had not demanded payment for his services. Today, this would be equivalent to accusing a person of not being a professional. While in Corinth, Paul had supported himself as a tentmaker (**Acts 18:1-4**); his critics saw this work as Paul's profession and his preaching as the opinions and thoughts of a mere tentmaker. These opponents of Paul considered themselves professional preachers, trained in the Jewish law and in public speaking (11:6, 22). They possessed the necessary credentials and, on the surface, appeared to be competent to lead the Corinthian church.
- Paul saw the situation in a totally different light, however. He saw these high-priced preachers (later he would call them "false apostles" and would imply that they were tools of Satan, 11:13-15) as mere "peddlers," or merchants, of the divine treasures of God's Word.

- It is obvious from 1 Corinthians that Paul did not object to preachers earning a living wage for their work in sharing the gospel. He had gone to great lengths to defend the right of preachers to financially support themselves through their ministry (**1 Corinthians 9:3-10**). On the other hand, Paul himself passed up that right. His desire was to present the gospel free of charge in order to show his sincerity.
- Paul consciously left his message and his life open to God's intense scrutiny. He dared not preach or speak anything that he would be ashamed to speak before God Himself. This was in sharp contrast to many preachers, whose primary motive was profit.

## **LESSON 3**

### **2 Corinthians 3**

#### **GOD'S GREAT NEW COVENANT—3:1-18**

In Paul's day, a letter of commendation from a reputable person could guarantee the success of one's endeavors. Traveling Christian evangelists in the first century, according to the custom of the day, carried letters of recommendation. With these, a poor preacher would be given at least a place to stay, a meal, and an opportunity to speak to the congregation. Apparently, some false teachers had gained access to the Corinthian church with such letters. But instead of using their influence to further the cause of the gospel, these teachers had criticized Paul's message and his authority. Part of that criticism was his lack of letters of recommendation.

Paul responded to these criticisms reluctantly. It seemed foolish to defend his ministry and authority to a church he had established himself. But as the criticisms grew louder, Paul spoke up. It should have been clear from the beginning that his ministry among the Corinthians had been empowered by the Holy Spirit. The testimony of those whose lives had been forever changed by Paul's gospel and the Spirit who empowered that gospel should have been more than enough proof of his authority.

Paul's defense of his ministry in this passage quickly turns to a lengthy comparison of his ministry of the Spirit with Moses' ministry of the law. This probably indicates that the false teachers who had infiltrated the Corinthian church were holding up Moses as a godly model. Paul insisted that the Holy Spirit's work within the lives of believers had greater power than Moses and the law.

Paul's critics were attacking his authority, his credentials, and even his abilities. Paul, however, did not reply with a self-defense. He freely admitted that his competence didn't come from his own abilities. But he did claim that his apostolic authority had been given to him by Jesus to plant churches and lead those churches in the Christian faith. Proof of his authority lay in the clear work of the Holy Spirit through his ministry. In this way, Paul steered the dispute back to the ultimate issue: whether the Corinthians would submit to Christ's authority in their lives.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 3:1.**

- The Corinthians were putting Paul in a difficult situation. He had founded the church along with his coworkers Silas and Timothy. Their existence as a church was due to spiritual leadership. Instead of questioning those preachers who came after him, the Corinthians had begun to question their own spiritual father. In essence, they were demanding that Paul present his qualifications to preach.
- *“Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or from you?”* In Paul's day traveling preachers and evangelists introduced themselves with letters of recommendation from various churches. Paul had written letters of recommendation on behalf of Phoebe (**Romans 16:1-2**) and Timothy (**1 Corinthians 16:10-11**). These letters helped Paul's trusted companions and friends find a welcome in various churches.
- Apparently, some false teachers had started using letters of recommendation to gain a speaking platform in the Corinthian church (11:13-15), and some were criticizing Paul's authority by subtly asking if he had presented any letters of recommendation. Justifiably,

Paul was annoyed that he would have to explain his apostolic credentials to the church he had founded.

## Read 2 Corinthians 3:2-3.

- Paul stated very clearly that he did not need any letters. He claimed that the changed lives of the Corinthian believers were “*our epistle written in our hearts.*” Their success was his success; their sorrows were his sorrows. Their lives of faith were etched in his heart and the hearts of Silas and Timothy, as well as visible to all.
- “*Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.*”
- This “letter” of Christ had been delivered by Paul and his coworkers; they were messengers for God and his glorious Good News of salvation. It was written by the Holy Spirit on the hearts and lives of those who believed. The Holy Spirit, who was working in the Corinthians’ hearts and was a guarantee of the Corinthians’ glorious inheritance in heaven, affirmed the authenticity of Paul’s message.
- Paul then compared this letter from Christ written on the Corinthians’ hearts to the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God on tablets of stone. Paul’s point is clear: The signs of the Spirit’s work in a person’s life are superior to any kind of writing, whether it was a church’s recommendation or the law of God etched on stone (**Exodus 31:18**).
- The imagery of writing on tablets of human hearts comes from the prophet Jeremiah. This Old Testament prophet had predicted that one day God Himself would remove Israel’s heart of stone and replace it with a

heart of flesh, a heart that would follow God's decrees because God Himself had written his law on it (**Jeremiah 31:33**).

- Paul was declaring to the Corinthians that the day Jeremiah predicted had come. The Holy Spirit was writing God's Word on their hearts and changing them on the inside. The new covenant of which Jeremiah spoke centuries ago was the gospel Paul preached. Paul's allusion to Jeremiah's prophecy begins his extended explanation in this chapter of the difference between the new covenant and the old covenant (3:6-18).

## **Read 2 Corinthians 3:4-5.**

- Paul refrained from vain boasting (3:1; 5:12; 10:18). Yet he expressed his confidence and assurance (1:15; 5:6, 8) in his own ministry, not because of his eloquence or sophistication, but because God through Christ had commissioned Paul as an apostle on the Damascus road (**Acts 9:15-19**).
- Paul had asked who was competent (or adequate) for the task of preaching the Good News (2:16). In this verse, Paul answered his own question: Only those who are called by God are competent, for their competence lies in God. Paul refused to boast in himself. Instead, he boasted in Christ's strength, which had become evident through his weaknesses (11:30).
- Paul's strategy with his opponents was ingenious. He refused to stoop to arguing over his own abilities. He freely admitted he was inadequate and incompetent for the task of communicating the Good News. Paul's humility about his own qualifications for the ministry exposed his critics for what they were—loud boasters.

## Read 2 Corinthians 3:6.

- After explaining that he wasn't boasting in himself, Paul declared that God had made him and his companions ministers of a New Testament or covenant (**1 Corinthians 11:25**).
- “*For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*” “The letter” refers to the Old Testament summary of the Law of Moses. The law’s purpose is to make people conscious of their sin, the sin which ultimately leads to death (**Romans 2:29; 3:19-20; 6:23; 7:6**). Attempting to be saved by keeping Old Testament laws will end in death. Only by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ can a person receive eternal life through the Holy Spirit. The law reveals man’s sin, but it cannot give life. Under the new covenant, eternal life comes from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives new life to all who believe in Christ.

## Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-8.

- Paul used the story of the giving of the Ten Commandments to illustrate the difference between his ministry and the ministry of Moses.
- The story can be found in **Exodus 34:29-35**. After receiving the Ten Commandments written by God Himself, Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the tablets. Although Moses did not realize it, his face was radiant and glowing; full of glory.
- If the law that leads to death was glorious, how much more glorious is God’s plan to give life through His Spirit. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is far superior to the Old Testament system of sacrifice.

- The old covenant had brought condemnation because it pointed out sin and its tragic consequence: death. In contrast, the new covenant of the Spirit brings life.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 3:9.**

- In this passage, Paul labels the old covenant as the ministry which brings condemnation, and the new covenant as the ministry which makes us right with God. Paul took it for granted that the Corinthians knew the reasoning behind his argument since he had spent a year and a half teaching them.
- Paul's letter to the Romans, however, explains in detail how the old covenant brings condemnation. The law carries a verdict of guilty because it points out sin in people's lives (**Romans 3:19-20; 5:12-13**). In contrast, the new covenant makes people right with God. God's old agreement makes us guilty, while God's new agreement "makes us right." (**Romans 4:3, 22**)
- God alone is truly righteous. No one is righteous before God (**Romans 3:10**). But God mercifully gives His own righteousness to those who believe in His Son (**Romans 5:17**). This way, all those who believe in Jesus are declared righteous before God (**Romans 3:20-22**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 3:10-11.**

- The old covenant was glorious. Not only did Moses' face shine, but thunder, lightning, earthquakes, dense clouds, blazing fire, and a deafening trumpet blast accompanied its inauguration at Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19:16-20**). The Israelites were terrified. They were forbidden from standing on the mountain or even on its

boundaries. If they did, they would die. The glory of God inspired awe and reverence.

- Paul did not discount the glory of the old covenant. He fully acknowledged it, but he made it clear that it was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new covenant. The new ministry of the Spirit is even more glorious. The changed hearts and lives of believers is an even more miraculous work of God than lightning, thunder, and earthquakes. In fact, this greater glory was eclipsing the glory of the old covenant. Just as the bright light of the sun makes a flashlight useless, so the surpassing glory of the new covenant renders the lesser glory useless.
- ***“For if what is passing away was glorious, then what remains is much more glorious.”*** Paul explained the greater glory of the new covenant. The fact that the old covenant was temporary, had been set aside, and was being superseded by the new covenant, once again underscored the more perfect nature of the new. It showed far more of God’s glory, for it would not only be everlasting, but it would also impart eternal life to anyone who believes in Jesus.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-13.**

- From his discussion on the superiority of the new covenant over the old, Paul concluded that the new inspires great boldness. Paul boldly preached the mysteries of salvation that had been obscured for centuries. Although the Jews had God’s promises regarding the coming Savior and Messiah in the Scriptures, not even their well-educated rabbis could know exactly what God planned to do. But to the apostles, God had revealed this mystery: God had planned long ago to offer salvation to both Jews and

Gentiles through the death of the Messiah (**Ephesians 3:6**). Openly and publicly, Paul was proclaiming this great mystery in the cities all over the Roman world.

- Paul's boldness was an outgrowth of his relationship with God and hope in the new covenant—the glorious, permanent ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Christian hope is a confident expectation that God will do what he promises to do. Just as Abraham fully expected that God would make him a father of many nations (**Romans 4:18-21**), Christians, too, can confidently expect that God will give them eternal salvation (**Romans 5:5**). This type of knowledge and confidence in the character of God inspired Paul to publicly proclaim the Good News of salvation.
- *“Unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.”* Paul interpreted the veil over Moses' face as an effort on Moses' part to conceal the fact that the radiance of his face was fading away. In the fading away of this brilliance, Paul saw a sign that the old covenant, which Moses presented to the people, would also fade.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 3:14-16.**

- It bothered Paul that not many Jews turned to Christ when the gospel was announced to them. Paul's common practice when he went to a city was to first preach to the Jews who gathered in the local synagogue (**Acts 18:1-4**). But the Jews rejected his message of salvation (**Acts 18:6-7**). At times, they even pursued Paul to other cities to try to silence him (**Acts 14:1, 19**).
- Jesus was Israel's Messiah, the person who fulfilled God's promises to Israel. The Jews, if anyone, should

be rejoicing. Instead, their hearts were hardened, their minds were made dull to what was occurring (**Romans 9-11; 10:1-3**). But Paul knew that the rejection of the gospel by the Jews was part of God's mysterious plan so that his free offer of salvation could extend to the Gentiles (**Romans 11:28**).

- Paul was astonished that the Jews could not understand the One to whom the Scriptures were pointing: Jesus Christ. A veil covered their minds and their hearts so that they could not understand the truth.
- But in Christ the veil is miraculously lifted. Just as Christ had opened Paul's spiritual eyes to the truth about Jesus, the Holy Spirit would also open others' eyes to how Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures.
- ***"When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."*** Moses and his veil illustrate the fading of the old system and the veiling of the Jews' minds by their pride and hardness of heart. The veil kept many Jews from understanding the references to Christ in the Scriptures they heard every week.
- When Moses turned to God, he removed the veil (**Exodus 34:34**). In the same way, when a person turns to Christ, God's only Son, the veil is taken away by Christ Himself. The veil represents the flesh that clouds a person's understanding about God's great plan of salvation.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.**

- Paul here introduced another reason why the new covenant is better than the old: it is a ministry of freedom. Christ's death on the cross bought freedom from sin and the condemnation that results from law-living (**Romans 8:1-4; Galatians 3:21-24**). He frees us from the fear of death which is the penalty for our sins (**Romans 5:17-18**). Jesus even frees us from the

evil powers of the age (**Galatians 1:4**). Christ frees us from the same mental veil that covered many of the Jews to whom Paul was preaching (3:14) so that we can understand the gospel as well as the finished work of Christ.

- ***“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.”*** The Greek word translated “mirrors” can be interpreted “to reflect as a mirror does.” Christians function like a mirror. Thus, all believers can reflect the glory of the Lord. In contrast, under the old covenant only Moses had access to the Lord’s presence and thus could reflect his glory. But now all Christians can reflect Christ’s glory. Thus, when Christians look at Christ, they become like Him and reflect His holy character in their lives (**Romans 8:28-29**).
- ***“[We] are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*** The glory the Spirit imparts to the believer is more excellent and lasts longer than the glory Moses experienced. By gazing at Christ with unveiled minds, all Christians will be more like Him. “Become more and more like him” is “being transformed.” The same word appears in **Matthew 17:2** and **Mark 9:2** where it refers to Jesus’ transfiguration and also in **Romans 12:2**.
- The Word of God reveals the truth about Christ, and the Spirit of the Lord works within us, drawing our attention to Him and transforming us into Christ-likeness.
- Becoming Christ-like is a progressive experience (**Romans 8:29; Galatians 4:19; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2**).
- The Holy Spirit brings about change in our lives slowly but surely in His own time and way.

## **LESSON 4**

### **2 Corinthians 4**

#### **SATAN BLINDS BUT GOD GIVES LIGHT—4:1-18**

Paul's authority and honesty were being questioned, and he was facing a church in revolt.

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 4:1.**

- God's plan of salvation—past, present, and future—imparts courage and endurance so that we do not lose heart. The Greek for this phrase can mean anything from not becoming discouraged to not acting like a coward. In other words, the glorious plan of God gave Paul hope and courage to face life with great confidence in God (3:4, 12; 5:6-8).
- Despite Paul's earlier hatred of Christians, God showed him mercy (**Ephesians 2:4; Titus 3:5**). Even though Paul was a self-proclaimed enemy of Jesus at one time, God was patient with him. Christ Himself stopped Paul on the road to Damascus, rescuing him from the path that leads to eternal death. Christ also commissioned him to preach the gospel (**Acts 9:1-19**). Paul deserved none of this, and he knew it (**1 Timothy 1:12-16**).

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 4:2.**

- This verse contrasts the way Paul preached with the methods of some of the traveling preachers who had come to Corinth. These preachers had sought a platform on which to speak and ask for financial support. Most likely, these were the ones who had been

leading the attack on Paul's travel plans (1:23-24), honesty (1:12), and credentials (3:1-3). This verse (as well as 1:12 and 12:16) answered Paul's opponents' accusation that he had somehow tried to mislead the Corinthians.

- ***“We [are] not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully...”*** One of the signs of the impure motives of these preachers was the way they handled God's Word. Instead of a straightforward presentation of the truths of the gospel, the false teachers who had visited Corinth were diluting God's Word or twisting it to serve their own selfish purposes.
- ***“...but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”*** When Paul preached the truths of God's Word, he reminded himself that he was preaching it before God. The Lord God, the One who knows all secrets, could look into Paul's heart and discern his motives. Paul was careful to preach with right motives. He consciously submitted his motivations to God's scrutiny, so that no shameful act or motive could disqualify him as a minister.
- Because Paul's preaching and motives had been called into question by the Corinthians, he pleaded with them to evaluate his behavior among them to see if he had been devious. Paul was confident that if they fairly judged him, he would be innocent of all of the charges against him.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.**

- Although the message Paul preached was a clear presentation of salvation, he admitted that the gospel would be veiled, or obscure, to some. Paul had already explained that the fragrance of his message would be

the smell of death to those who were dying (2:15); this verse states that their understanding will be obscured (4:3). The gospel will confuse and confound them. In 1 Corinthians, Paul had already explained how the wisdom of God is foolishness to the wise of this world (**1 Corinthians 1:18**). The same idea is being expressed here.

- ***“The god of this age has blinded [those] who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”*** Why can’t everyone understand the truth of the gospel? Out of his own experience, Paul answered this question. It is because the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, and, at one time, had blinded him to the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.
- However, believers recognize that Jesus is the exact visible image of God (**Colossians 1:15**). Jesus not only reflects the Father, but, as God, He reveals God to us (**John 1:18; 14:9; Hebrews 1:1-2**). Jesus is not a copy but the very embodiment of God’s nature. He is ***“the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being”*** (**Hebrews 1:3**). To know Jesus is to know God (**John 10:30; Philippians 2:6**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 4:5.**

- The focus of Paul’s preaching was Christ and not himself. In 1 Corinthians Paul had reminded the Corinthian believers that he had not presented the gospel with his own ideas or with eloquent phrases. Instead, Paul had preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified (**1 Corinthians 2:1-2**), and had stuck to the truths of God’s Word.

- Throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul explained that he was not trying to exercise authority over their faith (1:24). On the contrary, Paul was serving them as Christ's appointed messenger, faithfully explaining the finished work of Christ.

### Read 2 Corinthians 4:6.

- Paul returned to the image of light and darkness, which he had introduced in 4:4. The image symbolizes the stark difference between good and evil, between God and Satan.
- This verse makes it clear that this imagery of light and darkness came from the creation story (**Genesis 1:2-5**). Just as God had brought order out of the chaos of darkness by ordering, "***Let there be light in the darkness,***" so God was piercing the chaos of evil with the light of His truth. The light of Christ exposes falsehood and evil for what it is: a perversion of the good (**Ephesians 5:13-14**). Those who believe in Jesus become children of the light and live in the light. (**Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5**).
- **1 John 1:5** states that "***God is light and in Him is no darkness.***"
- This passage emphasizes that the light is the knowledge of the glory (grace, mercy, goodness **Exodus 32:18-19**) of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The light of Christ shines out of believers so that others can see the glory of God in our lives.

### Read 2 Corinthians 4:7.

- People keep treasures in safety deposit boxes and vaults. But God places His glorious treasure in fragile, cheap and ordinary clay jars.

- God works through the weak and powerless so that it is clear this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from people (**1 Corinthians 2:3-4**). Weakness and powerlessness should provide the basis for a renewed hope in God. The Lord loves to deliver, rescue, and save. For a Christian, powerlessness is never a limitation but an opportunity for God to work in mighty and powerful ways (**2 Corinthians 12:9-10**).
- The supremely valuable image of Jesus Christ is being reproduced in frail and fallible human beings (“clay jars”). Paul’s focus, however, was not on the perishable container but on its priceless contents—God’s powerful presence indwelling his people (**Colossians 1:27**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 4:8-9.**

- Paul refused to stoop to compare his credentials to those of his opponents. He steered away from boasting in himself. Instead, he recounted his sufferings.
- God always came to his rescue, not leaving him to be devoured by his enemies, even when he had been struck down. This may have been a reference to the time the citizens of Lystra dragged him outside of the city and stoned him, leaving him for dead. But the Lord enabled a bloody and bruised Paul to get up and continue preaching in the name of Jesus (**Acts 14:19-20**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 4:10-12**

- In each of these three verses, Paul clearly states the principle of death and resurrection. In verse 10 he says, *“Always carrying about in the body the dying [to self]*

*of the Lord Jesus.”* Why? So that the life of Jesus could be seen in the Corinthians.

- Keep in mind that every unbeliever is living for himself. When a believer is living a “dead to self” life, he stands out like a beacon on a hill.
- Paul then repeats the same message in verse 11. For Paul, Jesus’ death symbolized the believers’ death to their former selfish and wicked ways (**Romans 6:11; Galatians 2:20**). So Paul, always being given over to death (to self) for Jesus’ sake, did so, that Christ’s life may be revealed in his mortal body.
- *“So then death is working in us, but life in you.”* The wonderful part of Paul’s analogy with Jesus’ life and death is that it does not end with Jesus’ death on the cross. Death does not have the final word. Three days later Jesus was alive. He was raised from the dead, as the great Victor over sin and death. Although most of Jerusalem only saw a humiliated and weak man dying on a cross, Jesus’ followers saw the risen and glorified Lord (**Luke 9:23**).
- Paul knew his sufferings and death would never spell the end for the life-giving message of the gospel. In fact, God was working so that Paul’s dying to self would result in eternal life for those who believe in Jesus. This passage reminded the Corinthians that Paul’s self-less life had been used by God to bring the message of eternal life to them.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 4:13-14.**

- In this passage, Paul identified himself with the writer of **Psalms 116**. In this psalm, Paul saw an extraordinary expression of faith. The psalmist had refused to let his circumstances dictate to him what he should believe. Even death could not frighten him, for he had placed his

trust solidly in the God who was stronger than death. Paul knew faith is the way to receive God's free gift of salvation (**Romans 3:24-25**). In Ephesians, he wrote: ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God"*** (**Ephesians 2:8**). Not only is faith the way to eternal salvation, but it is also the way of life for believers. Christians are to walk by faith (5:7; **Galatians 2:19-20**). Believers are to look beyond the troubles of this world and live in light of their eternally secure position in Christ (**Colossians 3:1-3**).

- ***"[We know] that the He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you."*** Although Paul was experiencing the death to self of Christ on this earth (4:10-12), he placed his hope in the God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. Although Paul was facing suffering, he wasn't discouraged, because he knew Jesus would return and at that time, Paul and the Corinthian believers would also be raised with Jesus.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 4:15-16.**

- This passage explains that Paul endured much to benefit the Corinthians. As more people heard of and accepted the grace of God, that is, God's gift of salvation, more people would join the grand celebration before God, praising and thanking Him (4:14). Thanksgiving would overflow toward God. This would benefit the Corinthian Christians, for through their prayers, they also had participated in Paul's work of spreading the gospel (1:11). Ultimately, God would be glorified through all this.
- ***"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being***

*renewed day by day.*” Paul and his colleagues would not lose heart because they knew and trusted God.

- It is clear from the context that Paul was contrasting the temporary with the eternal. He was not merely talking about his physical body wasting away; he was also speaking of how all the things of this life—wealth, influence, power—were deteriorating. However, Paul saw his inner man, the part of himself that was destined for eternal life, as being renewed day by day (**Isaiah 40:31; Colossians 3:10**). The hardships of Paul’s life and ministry were real and were having their effect. He knew every trouble, hardship, and difficulty endured by God’s grace was making him spiritually new. This occurred day by day, trouble by trouble. Paul saw every difficulty as coming from the Lord to mature him in the faith.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.**

- Paul knew nothing in this life lasts forever. He knew the hardship he endured was a slight momentary affliction in comparison to the eternity he would have to enjoy God’s presence. He concluded, therefore, that the troubles of this world are an extremely light burden compared to the eternal weight of glory.
- What really matters is eternal and permanent and cannot be seen, touched, or measured. Only with the eyes of faith can people look at what cannot be seen and begin to understand the significance of eternity. A believer’s hope is not in this world, not in the power and wealth that can be accumulated on earth (**Romans 8:24**). Paul encouraged the Corinthians to live by faith and not by sight (5:7). The Corinthians were to take their eyes off of this world, for what can be seen is temporary, and place them on the Almighty, the One who possessed all power (**Hebrews 1:10-11**).

## **LESSON 5**

### **2 Corinthians 5:1–6:2**

#### **EARTHLY BODIES ARE WEAK–5:1-10**

As a Christian evangelist in the first century, Paul was insulted, ridiculed, and taunted. For the cause of the gospel, he faced angry mobs, irate local officials, and conceited philosophers. He spent many nights in prayer and long hours working to support himself and studying the Scriptures. He received no applause, no reward, and no appreciation.

Because the Holy Spirit was reproducing the life of Christ within Paul, he could measure all of his troubles in light of eternity. He knew he would experience unending joy in the next life. This confident hope encouraged Paul's motivation to never stop preaching the truth to all who would listen.

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:1.**

- Paul knew the Corinthians were wondering how he could endure so many hardships and difficulties (4:8-10), so he outlined his hope: the resurrection of his earthly body to heavenly glory.
- The Corinthians had difficulty understanding the resurrection and the Greeks did not believe in a bodily resurrection (Greek philosophers in Athens sneered at Paul when he spoke of a bodily resurrection—**Acts 17:32**). Therefore, Paul had thoroughly explained the doctrine of the resurrection to them (**1 Corinthians 15:12-57**). Paul made it clear that denying the resurrection of believers was the same as denying the resurrection of Jesus Himself and, thus, the Christian faith (**1 Corinthians 15:12-34**). Paul stated, “*If Christ*

*has not been raised, then your faith is useless” (1 Corinthians 15:17).* Paul would not risk his life for a futile and meaningless message (**1 Corinthians 15:30**).

- Life in this earthly body makes believers “groan” for their perfect heavenly bodies which will be imperishable, glorious, and eternal perfect bodies for our new eternal existence with Jesus Christ.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:2.**

- Although Paul was loaded down with all sorts of troubles in this world, he did not despair. **Romans 8:21-23** states that all of creation groans under the decay that resulted from sin, and these verses indicate that believers also join in that moaning. This “groaning” or “sighing” is rooted in the hope that we will be raised to eternal life with Jesus Christ (**Romans 8:24-25**).
- When Paul spoke of wanting to be clothed with a heavenly dwelling, he was referring to his longing to receive his resurrected body.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:3.**

- The believers in Corinth may have been influenced by the Greek idea that death would free the soul from the prison of the body. Often, the Greeks would speak of death as stripping the soul and leaving it naked. Paul is making it clear that believers’ will be covered with perfect, heavenly bodies.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:4.**

- This verse adds another image to Paul’s list regarding the heavenly body. In addition to speaking of it as a permanent building and overcoat, Paul pictured it as an

animal consuming its prey. The eternal and permanent will swallow up the temporary and the decaying. The fact that Paul piled image upon image and repeated himself indicates his concern that the Corinthians understand the bodily resurrection.

- To describe the transformation that would result, Paul had earlier in **1 Corinthians 15:39-40** compared the earthly body to a seed that had been planted in the ground. The small seed must “die” in order to grow into a living, beautiful plant. In the same way, the earthly body must be sown in weakness, decay, and even die before it yields the glorious, resurrected body (**1 Corinthians 15:42-44**).
- Few details are given about the Christian’s resurrected body, but the Bible does say it will be perfect, without sickness, disease, or pain (**Philippians 3:21; Revelation 21:4**).

## **Read 2 Corinthians 5:5.**

- Part of God’s wonderful plan to save those who believe in His Son includes the gift of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, God had sent His Holy Spirit to believers to empower them to be witnesses (**Acts 2**). Jesus had promised this would happen: The Spirit would come to remind them of the truth (**John 14:26; Acts 1:5-8**). Paul saw the Spirit at work in his life (**Romans 15:18-19; 1 Corinthians 12:13**) and in the lives of the Corinthians (**1 Corinthians 2:12; 3:16; 6:19; 12:7, 13**) as proof of his and their eternal destiny with God the Father. The Spirit was a deposit or “guarantee” (1:22) or down payment. We could say that the Spirit is God’s guarantee that He will one day pay up in full (**Ephesians 1:13-14**). The Holy Spirit within believers is a trustworthy guarantee that God will give

Christians everlasting bodies at the resurrection (1:22).  
Christians have eternity within them now!

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-7.**

- We live in a fallen world in cursed bodies. Paul did not lose heart in the face of the trials and sufferings he was facing (4:8-9, 17), because he remained confident in God and his plan of salvation. Although he knew that he was positionally secure in the Father's hand, he also knew that one day he would be set free from his earthly, fallen body and would be ushered into the presence of the Lord.
- ***“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*** To base life on what can be seen would be foolish. The world will pass away, but the truth of God's Word will never pass away (**1 John 2:17; Matthew 24:35**).
- Instead of basing our lives on the realities of this world, we Christians should evaluate everything we do in light of eternity (this takes faith). The beginning point of faith is believing in God's character (**Hebrews 11:6**); He is who He says He is. The end point is believing in God's promises; He will do what He says He will do. When Christians believe God will fulfill His promises, even though we don't see those promises materializing yet, this demonstrates true faith (**John 20:29**). Confidence in the realities that are unseen makes it possible for believers to persevere in faith, regardless of persecution, opposition, or temptation (**1 Peter 1:8-9**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:8.**

- This verse clearly states that to be away from these earthly bodies means being at home with the Lord. Paul also wrote in his letter to the Philippian believers that

departing from this life is to “*be with Christ*” (**Philippians 1:23**). These passages have been the subject of much debate over the exact state of believers at death. The debate stems from the fact that Paul wrote about the bodily resurrection occurring when Jesus returns (**1 Corinthians 15:51-54**) and also of believers being with Jesus immediately after they die.

- Christians can only affirm exactly what the Bible says: (1) When a believer dies, he or she will be with Jesus (**Philippians 1:23**). Believers will not float in a limbo state. Instead, they will have a personal encounter with the Savior. (2) When Jesus returns in all His glory, all believers will be given heavenly bodies that will be perfect and will last forever (**1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18**). A believer’s life in eternity will involve some type of bodily existence. We have the example of our Lord’s resurrected body as He appeared on earth. (3) The Spirit imparted to believers in this life not only guarantees they will be resurrected to eternal glory but also begins that transformation process (4:16; 5:5).

## **Read 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.**

- Eternal life is a free gift given on the basis of God’s grace (**Ephesians 2:8-9**); however, Christians’ lives will be judged by Christ. Salvation is never obtained by works (**Romans 4:4-5**), and this judgment before Christ will not determine believers’ eternal destiny. At this judgment, Christ will reward Christians for the way they lived on earth. All Christians will give account for how they have lived in this body (**Matthew 16:27; Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15**).

## BE RECONCILED TO GOD–5:11–6:2

The first step to resolving a dispute is asking the other person for forgiveness. This passage points out that God has graciously taken the first step toward reconciliation with human beings. This in no way implies that God is somehow guilty or at fault. Ever since Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden, people have consistently rebelled against God, ignoring His ways and depriving Him of the worship He deserves (**Romans 3:23**). Although all human beings have persisted in their rebellion, God has not destroyed them. Instead, He has provided everything to sustain life, from the air we breathe to the rains that make our crops grow (**Matthew 5:45**). Through His only Son, God the Father has reached out even further to His rebellious people. Through Christ's death, God canceled our debts and forgave our sins (**Colossians 2:13**). He even places His Holy Spirit in our hearts so we can live according to His perfect ways (**Galatians 5:16–18**). Through Jesus, God has taken the initial step toward reconciliation, and He offers the free gift of salvation to all people. Anyone can come to accept His free gift (**Ephesians 2:8-9; Revelation 22:17**).

### Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-12.

- After reminding the Corinthians that everyone will appear before Christ's judgment seat, Paul explained that he had evaluated his own motives and actions in light of this sobering fact. He knew and reminded himself of the fact that God saw his motivations. His life was an open book to God. Paul didn't have to prove to God that he was sincere, for God already knew it. Paul hoped that the Corinthians, also, would understand that his actions were motivated by a healthy respect for God, not by greed or any other sinful motivation.

- Paul feared God. The Greek word Paul used for “terror/fear” is *phobos*, the root of our English word “phobia.” The fear of God gives a person wisdom and motivates that person to avoid evil (**Proverbs 15:33; 16:6**). Thus, fear of God means having a proper respect for who He is. Believers who ponder the character of God should be filled with reverential awe, standing in wonder and amazement at his greatness.
- ***“We do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you an opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.”*** In this letter, Paul has been extremely cautious regarding bragging about himself to the Corinthians. Several times he has explicitly denied doing any such thing (see 3:1; 10:18). Paul knew that in the process of commending himself, he could easily fall into the trap of doing just what the false preachers were doing: bragging about their own spirituality and their own accomplishments.
- Paul’s Corinthian critics were more concerned about promoting themselves (2:17). They were preaching the gospel for money and popularity. They were boasting in outward appearance—eloquent speeches (11:5-6; **1 Corinthians 2:1**), formal letters of recommendation (3:1), and impressive presentations (10:10-11). In contrast, Paul and his companions were preaching out of concern for eternity and to glorify the ultimate Judge, God Himself. The Corinthians had been dazzled by these magnificent and impressive showmen and had been captivated by their persuasive communication. They had basically given up finding God’s perspective.

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:13.**

- Exactly what Paul meant by being “*beside ourselves or out of our mind*” is not entirely clear.
- Some have suggested that the Greek (*ekstasis*) for “out of our mind” means simply that Paul was “mad.” Mark used the Greek word in this sense to describe how Jesus’ family thought he was “mad” (**Mark 3:21**). Perhaps the Corinthians had begun to think that Paul had a mental problem. He welcomed all kinds of trials, difficulties, and sufferings and even listed them (4:7-9). Later, Festus would call Paul mad because of his unquenchable zeal to preach the gospel (**Acts 26:22-24**). Paul had already warned the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians that the gospel and its messengers would appear foolish to the wise of this world (**1 Corinthians 2:7-16**). If this was the idea that Paul was communicating, then he was saying that he was acting like a fool because of his zeal for God.

### Read 2 Corinthians 5:14.

- The “*love of Christ*,” not our love for Christ, but rather His love for us, compels, motivates, controls us. A thought to ponder: If we have a godly old grandmother who truly loves us, we’ll do anything for her. The last thing we would want to do would be to disappoint or hurt her in any way. In a similar way, as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and understand His great love for us, that love will motivate, compel, and control us.
- “*If One died for all, then all died.*” Jesus died for all; the perfect Son of God bore the curse that lay on all sinners. In **1 Corinthians 1:30**, we read, “*Of Him are you in Christ.*” At salvation, God took us out of Adam and placed us into Christ positionally. Therefore, when Christ died, we all died in Him.

## Read 2 Corinthians 5:15

- Because Christ died for all, those who “live” (believe in Jesus), now have the power and desire to abandon their old, selfish, self-centered ways, and live for Christ (**Romans 6:6-14; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:20**).

## Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-17.

- “***Therefore,***” because we have been crucified with Christ, “***we regard no one according to the flesh,***” or to further clarify that statement, when we look at folks, we don’t see their flesh, nor do we see their flesh through our flesh.
- Furthermore, Paul had evaluated Jesus from a worldly point of view—in Greek, literally, “after the flesh.” As an educated Jew, Paul was looking forward to the Messiah. But the Jews of his time were looking for a political Messiah, a powerful person who would free them from Roman rule and bless their lives so they could live happily ever after. So, not only did Paul need to have his mind renewed (**Ephesians 4:23**) regarding people, but he must also re-evaluate his relationship with Jesus. Did Jesus come to change Paul’s earthly circumstances (make life easy for him), or was His purpose to reproduce Himself in Paul. Many Christians have this type of fleshly relationship with Jesus, looking for Him to change their unpleasant circumstances, rather than looking for an exchanged life (no longer I, but Christ).
- “***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.***” In **1 Corinthians 1:30**, Paul tells us that at salvation we are taken out of Adam and placed into Christ. We are a new creation in Christ.

Christians are not reformed, rehabilitated, or reeducated; we are recreated (a new creation) in Christ. At conversion, we believers are not merely changing our lives; we are exchanging our life (no longer I, but Christ, **Galatians 2:20**).

- The old position in Adam has passed away. The old order of sin and death, the selfish, sinful Adamic human nature has been dealt a death blow (**Galatians 5:16-21, 24**). In its place, the new life in Christ has come. To draw attention to the coming of this new position, Paul announced it with the word “see.”

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:18.**

- It is God Who has reconciled (brought from the place of an enemy to the place of a friend).
- This new creation is not of any human doing. God Himself has begun the work. Only God can allow people to approach Him. Only God can satisfy His own righteous demands. Only God can save. God is the Author and Finisher of salvation (**Hebrews 12:2**). God brought His people to himself (reconciled us) by blotting out our sins (**Ephesians 2:13-18**) and making us righteous. When we put our trust in Christ, we are no longer God’s enemies. Through Christ’s self-sacrificial work on the cross, God has made us part of His family. Jesus died in our place so that we might enjoy fellowship with God (**1 Corinthians 15:3**).
- Because we believers have been reconciled (brought from the place of an enemy to the place of a friend) to God, we have the privilege of bringing others to accept God’s free gift and become reconciled as well.

## Read 2 Corinthians 5:19.

- This is a brief summary of what Paul meant by the “*ministry of reconciliation*.” Just in case the Corinthians had forgotten the heart of Paul’s message to them, he repeated it: Christ was reconciling the world to God by no longer imputing or counting people’s sins against them. Paul used a Greek word for “counting” that was commonly used for calculating the debt of a person. Thus, God was no longer calculating people’s debt to him; instead, He was freely giving them more: the precious gift of salvation.
- Through Christ’s death on the cross, God was bringing back all people, Jews and Greeks alike, who had fallen (**Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:14-17**). “[*God*] *has given us message of reconciliation*.” Not only did God bring us from the place of an enemy to the place of a friend, but He also has given us the privilege of bringing others.

## Read 2 Corinthians 5:20-21.

- An ambassador is one who represents his homeland (in Christ is our position). Paul described himself and his coworkers as Christ’s ambassadors—representatives of Christ to the world (5:19).
- Paul was a spokesman for God. The message he preached was, in fact, God’s appeal to the world. Paul obtained his authority to preach from God himself. God had not given this authority to Paul because he was an especially gifted speaker or had the right credentials (**1 Corinthians 12:3**).
- Paul’s message that he delivered on Christ’s behalf was to be reconciled to God. Paul phrased this command in the passive tense. He wasn’t commanding people to reconcile themselves; they were incapable of doing that.

Instead, Paul was announcing that they could be reconciled to God by accepting God's free gift of reconciliation. Paul did not announce this message halfheartedly. He implored, even urged and pleaded, everyone who would listen to accept God's free gift of salvation.

- ***“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.”*** God made Jesus, who was completely innocent and perfect, to identify Himself with our sin so He could bear our penalty of death (**Galatians 3:13**).
- Many people in Jesus' day expressed surprise at Jesus' life because they could not find anything wrong with Him (see Pilate's words in **Luke 23:14**, the centurion's words in **Luke 23:41-48**, and God's testimony in **Matthew 3:17; 17:5**). The disciples, Jesus' closest friends and followers, did not find any evil in his actions (**1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5**). Here Paul used the Greek word meaning “to know” in a personal way; thus Paul was saying that Jesus never knew what it meant to sin. He always followed God's ways.
- ***“That we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*** Since Jesus, who was perfect and innocent, took on the penalty of sin, death itself, Jesus can now give those who believe in Him His righteousness. His perfect righteousness can cover our corrupt and imperfect lives. When people trust in Christ, they make an exchange—their sin for His righteousness. Believers' sin was placed on Jesus at His crucifixion. His righteousness is given to believers at their conversion. This is what is meant by Christ's atonement for sin.
- Here, Paul clarified the eternal transaction whereby each believer is passed ***“from death to life”*** (**John 5:24**).

## Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2.

- “Grace” is God’s undeserved favor. People receive God’s totally undeserved gift by believing in Jesus. Even a person’s ability to believe is a gift from God (**Ephesians 2:8**). God has made a way for people to be reconciled to Him. All one must do is respond in faith to the announcement of this Good News.
- In this passage, Paul was most likely imploring the Corinthians, who had already accepted Jesus, to live out their faith.
- ***“For he says, ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”*** The prophet Isaiah predicted a time of God’s favor, a time of God’s own choosing, when He would save His people: God would release them from bondage and clear a path for them to return to their land (**Isaiah 49:8-12, 23-26**). God would do all this so that the whole world would know that He was Israel’s Savior and Redeemer (**Isaiah 49:26**). The Hebrews who had heard Isaiah’s message long ago would have understood this as a prediction that God would one day bring the Israelites back out of their exile in Babylon. This did occur (**Ezra 1**).
- However, Paul understood Isaiah’s prediction as also being fulfilled in his day. God had sent Jesus to the earth. It was the time of God’s favor. Moreover, Jesus died on the cross to save all who believe in Him (**John 3:16-17**). It was the ***“day of salvation.”*** Being God’s messenger just as Isaiah was, Paul echoed Isaiah’s message with even more urgency. Paul announced that what Isaiah was looking forward to had occurred.

## **LESSON 6**

### **2 Corinthians 6:3–7:1**

#### **PAUL PATIENTLY ENDURES HARDSHIP–6:3-13**

“For better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.” At a wedding, a couple exchanges their vows. These vows list a variety of situations in which they agree to love each other. Paul did something similar for the Corinthians. He listed the different situations he had endured in order to remain faithful to Christ and His divine calling to preach the Good News. Paul had demonstrated his willingness to suffer all kinds of hardships, beatings, imprisonments, poverty, and even insults for Jesus. He had a single-hearted commitment to Christ. This extraordinary commitment, demonstrated by the sufferings he had endured, was proof of his apostolic authority. Instead of submitting a list of successes and accomplishments, Paul submitted a list of difficult situations that he had endured for Christ.

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-5.**

- Paul did not want any of his actions to discredit God or the ministry. The last thing he wanted to do was bring ridicule on God’s glorious plan of salvation.
- ***“But in all things we have commended ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings.”*** In every way imaginable Paul had proven to be Christ’s trustworthy servant.
- However, the Corinthians had begun to doubt Paul’s credentials and, more importantly, his authority over them (12:11). So Paul listed the different situations in

which he had served God. Similar to his weaknesses in 4:8-10, this list includes predicaments that most preachers would not reveal to their audiences.

- When calling Paul to be an evangelist, Christ warned him that he would suffer greatly (**Acts 9:15-16**). At key junctures in Paul's ministry, the Holy Spirit had warned him of all types of hardships that he would face. Paul, was not concerned about these difficulties or even about his own life. He continued to focus on his mission. He wanted to fulfill the task that God had given him: to announce the Good News (**Acts 20:23-24**). He knew that nothing—neither hardship, persecution, hunger, nor nakedness—could separate him from Christ's love (**Romans 8:37-39**).
- After describing in general terms what he had endured for Jesus, Paul now named some of the specific situations.
- For preaching Christ, Paul had been beaten, "*in stripes*." In 11:23-25, Paul recalls that he had been whipped five times by the Jews. He also had been beaten with rods by the civil authorities on three separate occasions. Luke recorded in the book of Acts that Paul and Silas suffered this punishment at Philippi (**Acts 16:23-24**).
- Paul had been put in jail in Philippi (**Acts 16:23**). In almost every city, Paul had faced angry mobs, usually stirred up by resentful Jews. In Pisidian Antioch, Jews stirred the high-ranking men and women of the city to expel him from that city (**Acts 13:49-52**). In Iconium, the citizens plotted to stone Paul to death (**Acts 14:5-6**). In Lystra, an angry mob did stone him, and, miraculously, he survived it and went to the next town to preach the Good News (**Acts 14:19**). At Philippi, a mob seized Paul and Silas and had them imprisoned (**Acts 16:19-24**). At Thessalonica, a crowd looking for

Paul surrounded Jason's house (**Acts 17:5**). At Ephesus, an enraged mob of silversmiths seized Paul's traveling companions (**Acts 19:23-41**). Even during Paul's ministry among the Corinthians, the Jews of Corinth seized Paul and brought him before the governor (**Acts 18:12-17**). Everywhere Paul preached the gospel, he was met with incensed mobs. He knew opposition, but he also expected Jesus would see him through those difficult situations (1:3-7).

- After listing some of the involuntary hardships he faced, Paul mentioned the hardships he had endured voluntarily.
- Paul had worked to exhaustion so as not to become a burden to the people he was preaching to, especially the Corinthians (11:9). In Thessalonica, he worked night and day; perhaps this caused some of those sleepless nights Paul endured (**1 Thessalonians 2:9; 3:8**). Perhaps some of those voluntary sleepless nights were not spent in physical labor but in prayer for all the churches (11:28; **Romans 1:10; Ephesians 1:16; Philippians 1:4**). Moreover, Paul had gone without food. (11:7-10).

## **Read 2 Corinthians 6:6-7.**

- In the middle of his list of the difficult situations he faced for the cause of Christ, Paul listed five character traits of an effective minister of the gospel.
- First, he and his coworkers had acted in purity. Paul's actions (**1 Timothy 5:22**) and thoughts (**Philippians 4:8**) were pure.
- Second, he and his coworkers had knowledge. This does not refer to a wealth of information, but rather is a progression of truth which begins with looking at life from God's point of view (wisdom) and moves onto

understanding and finally to knowing without any doubt that this is truth.

- Third, they had patience. The patience he had was from the Holy Spirit; in Galatians Paul stated that ***“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”*** (Galatians 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit is the giver of the Fruit of the Spirit. Even Paul’s character traits were not of his own doing but a product of the Holy Spirit dwelling within him.
- Fourth, they treated others with kindness. Through the Spirit’s power, Paul had considered others’ needs above his own.
- Finally, they had sincere love. The unconditional and self-sacrificial love that Jesus had shown to the Corinthians when He died for them on the cross (Romans 5:5) was the type of love Paul emulated in his ministry.
- Although Paul encountered all kinds of opposition, he did not give up preaching the word of truth. Although traveling preachers were deceiving the Corinthians with a false gospel (4:2; 11:4), Paul would continue to preach the truth so that God’s power might be demonstrated (1 Corinthians 2:1-4).
- ***“By the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.”*** A Roman soldier would arm himself with a full-length shield in his left hand and a spear in his right hand. In the original Greek, weapons in the right hand were to attack, while weapons in the left were to defend. No Roman soldier was fully prepared for battle without both weapons: his shield on his left and his spear on his right.

**Read 2 Corinthians 6:8-10.**

- Instead of worrying about the reaction of his audience, Paul focused on whom he was serving—God (6:4). He would serve God whether he was honored or despised, whether he was slandered or praised. No flattery or insult would distract Paul from preaching the Good News.
- ***“By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known.”*** This passage contrasts how God evaluated Paul’s ministry with how his critics saw it. God’s evaluation mattered most to Paul, for he had his sights set on eternity, not on the temporary conditions of the present (5:1-10).
- The paradox was that though Paul and his coworkers were completely honest, they were still being accused as impostors. They had renounced all deceptive means to communicate the message of God (4:2). Paul preached the truth with a genuine frankness and with the power of God Himself (**1 Corinthians 2:4**).
- Paul’s preaching and actions were well known to many, but in contrast, the powerful and wise of this world treated him as unknown. They considered his message as foolishness (**Acts 17:18-21, 32-33; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10**).
- ***“As dying, and behold we live.”*** Second Corinthians began with an explanation of how Paul had faced death in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey; 1:8). But, even so, he was still alive. **Acts 14** reveals that after being stoned, Paul miraculously got up and went to the next city to preach the gospel (**Acts 14:19-20**). Although he had been left for dead, Paul continued to live and preach.
- ***“As chastened, and yet not killed.”*** Paul had been beaten and whipped on numerous occasions for preaching the gospel (6:5; 11:23-24). In the first

century, often people would die of a beating at the hands of the authorities. The Jews used whips with metal pieces which would tear into the flesh. The Roman authorities beat offenders with rods. Both beatings could be severe enough to kill a person.

- Paul's sufferings were a mark of his apostolic authority. Christ had called him to suffer for the gospel (1:5-7; **Acts 9:16**).
- "***As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.***" In addition to hardships, Paul's ministry involved mental anguish. Paul had agonized over the Corinthians' spiritual welfare, as well as the welfare of other churches. He had spent night and day in prayer, committing these churches and their congregations to the Lord (**Romans 10:1; Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:11**). Although the hearts of him and his coworkers would ache over the churches, they were filled with joy because they knew what their spiritual struggles would accomplish.
- "***As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.***" Paul had no earthly riches. He had worked long hours as a tentmaker in order to preach the gospel free of charge to the Corinthians (**Acts 18:1-5**). However, Paul was spiritually rich (**2 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 1:3; Romans 8:17**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 6:11-13.**

- Paul had been completely straightforward with the Corinthians. His transparent honesty is mentioned at numerous places in this letter (1:12-13, 23-24; 2:17; 4:1-2; 5:11).

- Critics at Corinth were accusing Paul of deception, and he hoped that the very fact of his openly sharing his own weaknesses and sufferings before the Corinthians would testify to his honesty. Who would submit a list of failures to one's critics? What preacher would admit he was perplexed and troubled? But Paul did, even though his severest critics resided at Corinth. He had opened up his life and ministry not only to God but also to the Corinthians (5:11). He submitted it to their inspection and examination because he knew that God was his final judge (5:9-10; **1 Corinthians 4:5**).
- ***“You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.”*** Paul had revealed his true feelings for the Corinthian believers. The Corinthians, however, were reacting coldly to Paul. They criticized his preaching (11:6; **1 Corinthians 2:1-4**), his writing (1:13), and his demeanor among them (10:9-10). Although Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, had founded the Corinthian church, the church was rejecting its founder (1:14).
- As Paul would explain in this letter, any harsh words he had for the Corinthians came from his deep love for them (7:8-13). He wanted them to grow in the faith. Paul hoped his sincerity in this letter and the way he opened up his life to the Corinthians' examination would prompt them to also open their hearts to him.

## **BE SEPARATE FROM UNBELIEVERS—6:14–7:1**

Often the triangle is used to explain hostility in relationships. For instance, a daughter might have a wonderful relationship with her mother. The daughter, however, can easily poison that relationship by having a

girlfriend whom the mother dislikes. The aversion for this friend will inevitably affect the mother's relationship with her own child. The harmony of the family will be disrupted until the mother changes her feelings for the friend or the child ends the friendship.

This passage seems to be describing the same type of phenomenon. If the Corinthians wanted to be reconciled to God (5:20), they must separate themselves from unbelievers (6:14). It was that simple. A partnership with those who worship other gods would poison a relationship with the one true God.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-15.**

- After appealing to the Corinthians to open their hearts to him, Paul exhorted them not to form binding relationships with nonbelievers because this might weaken their Christian commitment, integrity, or standards.
- Earlier, Paul had explained that not associating with unbelievers did not mean isolation from nonbelievers (**1 Corinthians 5:9-10**). The Corinthians were even to remain with their unbelieving spouses (**1 Corinthians 7:12-13**). In order to witness to their neighbors, believers were to adopt some of the customs of the people to whom they were witnessing: *“I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ”* (**1 Corinthians 9:22**).
- So what did it mean to avoid being *“unequally yoked together with unbelievers”*? The Greek for “yoked together” was used in the first century for the act of harnessing animals together. It was against God's law to yoke together animals with different degrees of strength, such as an ox and a mule, because the plow

would be pulled unevenly (**Deuteronomy 22:10**). In the same way, a believer and an unbeliever have different spiritual fathers (God and Satan) and therefore they are not going in the same spiritual direction.

- While this verse applies to all partnerships and alliances, marriage certainly comes under this teaching.
- ***“For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”*** These two questions highlight the spiritual and ethical difference between believers and unbelievers. The first question emphasizes that Christians, as recipients of God’s righteousness through Jesus, have an inward desire to do right. In contrast, unbelievers have an inward desire to do wrong. Spiritually, they have nothing in common.
- The second question is centered around the fact stated in **1 John 1:5** ***“that God is light.”*** Keep in mind that John called Jesus the light of the world, a term Jesus had used to describe himself (**John 1:4-7; 3:19-21**). John also used the image of light to describe God’s salvation (**John 1:5; 3:19; 8:12**). In contrast, “darkness” refers to the chaos that reigns when lies and deceptions pass for the truth, when evil is considered good and good is considered evil (**Romans 1:25-26**). Obviously, light and darkness cannot exist in harmony.
- ***“And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”*** Paul continued his series of rhetorical questions by underscoring the religious differences between believers and unbelievers.
- The third question contrasts the great difference between Christ and the Devil. The Greek word *beliar* is translated “the Devil” and is derived from a Hebrew word that means “worthlessness” or “lawlessness.”

- Since believers are intimately connected to Jesus Christ (5:20-21), they cannot have any fellowship with the things of the Devil. On the other hand, unbelievers are being deceived and enticed by Satan (4:3-4).
- The fourth question explains that believers and unbelievers can never truly partner together. With these penetrating questions, Paul seemed to be advising the Corinthians to be wary of entering into associations that might compromise their Christian ethics and morals.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 6:16-18.**

- In Paul's fifth question, he was referring to the community of faith as the temple of God. As building blocks of this glorious temple, each individual was to live a life of dependence on God. There were no mixed loyalties; no compromise or agreement had been made between the true God and other so-called gods.
- With these five short questions, Paul was emphasizing the absurdity of Christians continuing to associate with idols or idol worship.
- ***“As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’”***
- The prophet Ezekiel prophesied of a time when God would live among His people forever (**Ezekiel 37:26-28**). By quoting this passage, Paul was saying that Ezekiel's prophecy was being fulfilled in the Corinthian church. Jesus, a descendant of David and the Son of God, had begun His reign as the King of a heavenly kingdom. As believers, the Corinthians were part of this spiritual kingdom. Jesus, as God in human form, had literally shown people what God was like (**Matthew 1:23; John 1:14**). In a real sense, God had lived among His people. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension,

God sent His Holy Spirit to the believers who had gathered in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. From that day to the present, every believer has God living within his or her spirit (**Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Timothy 1:14**).

- ***“Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.’”*** Instead of partnering with unbelievers, the Corinthians were to be separate from anything that was unclean or anything sinful.
- To emphasize his point, Paul strung together several Old Testament quotes. He loosely quoted **Isaiah 52:11**: ***“Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing!”*** Originally this was a command for the exiles to come out of Babylon and to abandon any object associated with pagan worship. Paul interpreted this command as also a command to Christians to separate themselves from the immoral pagan peoples around them.
- Paul continued his comparison of the Corinthian Christians with the returning Israelite exiles. The phrase ***“I will receive you”*** is an adaptation of Ezekiel’s prophecy that God would gather all of Israel’s exiles together (**Ezekiel 20:34**). Paul goes on to loosely quote **2 Samuel 7:14**.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 7:1.**

- Because God has given these promises: to live with his people (6:16), to welcome them as his people (6:17), and to be a loving Father toward them (6:18), we Christians are to, by grace through faith, cleanse ourselves from all of the fleshly strongholds that destroy

our relationship with God. Always keep in mind that the finished work of Christ has made a way for us to be set free as we walk by faith (**Titus 2:11, 12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5**).

- ***“Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”*** The Greek word for holiness means “becoming mature” or “becoming complete.” Thus, Paul wasn’t suggesting that the Corinthians could become sinless in this life. Instead, he was prodding the Corinthians to mature in their faith. God had provided them with all the resources they needed, and Christ’s Spirit would empower them to become Christ-like (**Romans 8:2; 8:28-29**).
- In his letter to the Philippians, Paul denied that he was perfect (**Philippians 3:12**) and saw his imperfection as a reason to press on to become more like Christ (**Philippians 3:13-15**). Paul knew that only the Spirit within him could provide the power and desire to pursue spiritual maturity (**Romans 8:2**). Believers will finally reach perfection at Christ’s return. Until then, they are commended to the Holy Spirit to mature them in the faith (**Jude 1:24-25**).
- Paul exhorted the Corinthians to pursue purity out of fear of God. “Fear” means to keep respect or awe for God. He is the almighty Creator.

**LESSON 7**  
**2 Corinthians 7:2-16**

**THE CHURCH'S REPENTANCE  
GIVES PAUL JOY—7:2-16**

This passage describes Paul's meeting with Titus. Although Paul had faced strong opposition in Macedonia (7:5), Titus's arrival had filled him with joy and encouragement. Titus had brought good news from Corinth: The believers were growing in their faith and confronting some of the persistent problems in their congregation. Knowing that the church he had founded in Corinth was maturing was the best kind of news Paul could have hoped for. His joy and his praise for God knew no bounds.

Titus had told Paul of the Corinthians' steps at reconciling themselves to Paul. The joy of meeting Titus had been accompanied by an even greater joy: Paul had been delighted to hear that the Corinthians were sorry about the distressing incident that occurred on his last visit and that they longed for him to visit them again (7:7).

**Read 2 Corinthians 7:2-4.**

- This repeats Paul's plea for the Corinthians to "***open wide your hearts***" (6:13). This appeal logically follows Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians to separate themselves from relationships with unbelievers that would compromise their loyalty to Christ (6:14–7:1). By separating themselves from the entanglements of evil, they could make room in their hearts for Paul as well as a deeper relationship with the Lord.
- "***We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.***" This appeal to be received is coupled with three denials. Most likely, Paul was

responding to accusations that the Corinthians had been repeating. Not one person among the Corinthians had been wronged, corrupted, or taken advantage of. All three words were commonly used for deceitful financial dealings. Paul's critics may have been criticizing the collection for the Jerusalem church (8:1-7). The end of this letter contains a strong defense against the charge of financially exploiting the believers (12:13, 17-18).

- ***“I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.”*** The believers at Corinth may have thought that Paul was abandoning them or dismissing them as genuine Christians. Here Paul assured the Corinthians that this was not his intent.
- To die and live is contrary to nature; it's always live first and then die, except for Christians. We must die to live.
- Paul considered himself so intimately connected to the Corinthians that he did not want to live and then die with them, but rather in Christ he wanted to die (to self) so that he could live with them.
- ***“Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.”*** Like a loving father, Paul had boasted to Titus of the Corinthians and hoped to one day boast about them before Jesus (1:14; 7:14). Paul possessed great hope in Titus's recent report (7:14). Moreover, even though Paul had recently faced many afflictions, knowing that the Corinthians were maturing in the faith had brought him great consolation and joy (1:3-11).

## **Read 2 Corinthians 7:5-7.**

- Here Paul resumed the story that he left off in 2:13 of how he had forsaken some exciting evangelistic

opportunities in Troas in order to look for Titus in Macedonia. He knew that Titus had visited Corinth and would have some news of how the Corinthians were progressing in their faith. So, like a father who was anxious to hear news of his children, Paul had hurried ahead to find out how the Corinthians were doing.

- Paul had told the Corinthians he was concerned regarding the welfare of Titus and the Corinthians (2:13). Most likely, Paul's fears were a profound concern over the spiritual maturity of the churches he had founded (**1 Thessalonians 3:1-5**). He spent hours in prayer (**1 Thessalonians 3:10**). This may account for his lack of sleep (11:27) and rest. In fact, he would tell the Corinthians that every day he was burdened with his concern over the spiritual fate of the churches (11:28).
- *“Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you.”* The previous verses state that the Corinthians had brought Paul great joy. Though Paul still had many problems to face in Macedonia, God had encouraged him at the right time with the arrival of Titus.
- Titus had been sent on a difficult mission. He had to deliver a stern letter from Paul that exhorted the Corinthians to right some wrongs. No one knew how the Corinthians would react. Titus brought word that the Corinthians had welcomed him and his unpleasant message. He had been welcomed as an emissary of Paul.
- *“When he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.”* According to Titus's report, the Corinthians were truly sorry about the incident and wanted to reaffirm to Paul their loyal love for him. They were even looking forward to Paul's next visit.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-9.**

- Paul had written a “stern letter” to the Corinthians soon after his “painful visit” with them. In this letter, he had exhorted the Corinthians to discipline their members who persisted in error, specifically, the one who had publicly opposed Paul’s authority (2:1-4; 7:8; 13:1-4). At first, it appears that Paul was sorry he had sent that letter. He had written it with a great amount of anguish (2:4), knowing that his tone and his message would be painful to the Corinthian believers. But Titus’s report that they were still anxiously awaiting his visit and had reaffirmed their loyalty to him had caused Paul to change his mind. The letter had produced its desired effect. Although harsh, it had produced a change of heart in the Corinthians, the repentance that God desired.
- Paul quickly explained the source of his happiness. He wasn’t happy about the Corinthians’ sorrow; on the contrary, he never wanted to grieve them. However, Paul knew it was necessary to make the Corinthians sorry in order to prompt them to repentance.
- Godly repentance is a “turning around,” the type of sorrow that compels a person to change his or her direction. Paul was deeply concerned regarding how the Corinthians had received his latest letter (7:5). Just as Paul was concerned that the disciplined offender might be overwhelmed by sorrow (2:6-7), so he had been worried that the Corinthians’ sorrow over the letter might overwhelm them and lead to more and deeper problems. Instead, the letter had done what God intended and administered the right amount of rebuke so that the church had not been harmed (literally, “had not experienced any loss”).

## Read 2 Corinthians 7:10-11.

- Many people are sorry only for the consequences of their sins or for being caught. But godly sorrow produces a changed mind which ultimately leads to salvation and a changed life.
- Compare the stories of Peter and Judas. Both handled the events surrounding Jesus' death in a wrong way. Judas brazenly betrayed Jesus with a kiss (**Mark 14:43-46**). Peter denied knowing Jesus three different times (**John 18:15-27**). Both were overcome with grief over their actions (**Matthew 26:75; 27:3**). Although Peter was distraught, he admitted his failure, changed his mind and turned back to Christ (**John 21:15-19**). In contrast, Judas was overcome by guilt and committed suicide. Again Paul states in verse 10, "*godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation [...] but the sorrow of the world produces death.*"
- Titus's encouraging report from Corinth gave Paul the evidence that the Corinthians had responded appropriately to his stern letter—with earnestness and an eagerness to clear themselves.
- Their intense longing and great concern to restore their damaged relationship with Paul had led them to take prompt action against the offender to see justice done (2:5-11). They were so earnest about clearing themselves they might have been too harsh on the offender. So Paul revealed how to show love to the offender and welcome him back into the community of faith. Although the Corinthians may have punished the offender too harshly, Paul praised them. Their zeal to right wrongs and to change their behavior was exactly the kind of "*godly sorrow*" Paul was looking for.

## Read 2 Corinthians 7:12-13.

- Paul stated the purpose of his last letter, the letter he had written with tears (2:4). His primary purpose was to save the deteriorating relationship between himself and the Corinthians; and according to the previous verse, the letter had done just that.
- Paul did not mention the name of the one who did the wrong because more than likely his letter would be circulated in all the churches of southern Greece. Since Paul was instructing the Corinthians to restore this man to Christian fellowship, he didn't want his name to be unnecessarily despised. Because Paul spent a considerable amount of time explaining and defending his ministry in this letter (1:12-24; 3:1-6; 4:5-18; 5:11-21; 6:3-13; 10:1-18; 13:1-4), many commentators have come to the conclusion that the offender was someone who challenged Paul's authority on his last visit to Corinth.
- The Corinthians' appropriate reaction to Paul's letter had encouraged Paul. In addition, he was encouraged by the way Titus had been refreshed by all of the Corinthians. Even though the church in Corinth was in turmoil, Titus had delivered the disagreeable news to the Corinthians. No one, not even Paul, knew how the Corinthians would respond. Yet Titus was pleasantly surprised because the Corinthians welcomed him and his message.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 7:14-16.**

- Although Paul refused to boast in his own accomplishments in this letter (3:1; 5:12; 10:12, 18), he didn't hesitate to boast in God's accomplishment through him (1:12; 6:4; 10:8, 13-17; 11:30). Here he even boasts in the Corinthians, just as he anticipated the day when he would boast of them before Jesus (1:14).

- Even though the Corinthians had caused Paul so much pain and grief (2:4; 8:16; 11:28), Paul still was proud of his spiritual children. He refused to focus on their weaknesses and failures; instead, he praised their strengths (8:7; **1 Corinthians 14:12**).
- *“And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.”* Here Paul went to great lengths to emphasize Titus’s respect and devotion for the Corinthians. Paul emphasized their relationship with Titus because he was sending Titus back to them to collect money for the Jerusalem church (8:16-18).
- At the same time, Paul praised the Corinthians for welcoming Titus as an official representative of Paul himself. The Corinthians had also welcomed Titus with fear and trembling because of the seriousness of his mission.

## **LESSON 8**

### **2 Corinthians 8**

#### **GENEROUS GIVING—8:1-24**

The next two chapters provide us with clear teaching regarding finances and stewardship.

Even though some of the Corinthians were questioning his authority, Paul bravely asked for financial help for the impoverished Jerusalem Christians. About a year before the writing of 2 Corinthians, the believers in Corinth had started collecting money for the poor in Jerusalem (8:10). First Corinthians instructed the Corinthians to set aside money every week for the offering (**1 Corinthians 16:1-4**). But that collection had floundered (8:10-11). It appears that greedy, traveling preachers (2:17) had suggested that Paul had invented the collection to extort money from the congregation. They believed this, even though Paul had taken no money from the Corinthians to support his own ministry (7:2; 11:7-9; 12:14-17). He had supported himself as a tentmaker when he was in Corinth (**Acts 18:1-4**). One of the purposes of 2 Corinthians was to encourage the Corinthians (in a diplomatic way) to finish the collection they had started a year ago (8:10-11; 9:1-3). Paul was sending Titus as his official representative to lead these efforts (8:16-17).

It was only after he had given the Corinthians an illustration of true generosity that he appealed to the Corinthians to follow their example (8:1-5). The Macedonians had given out of their poverty. They had given out of their devotion to Christ and had even begged Paul for the opportunity to give.

Paul's his appeal for money was detailed with an explanation of the precautions he had taken to ensure that the money would not be mishandled. Two representatives from the churches would accompany Titus to Corinth to guarantee that the money would reach its intended recipients. These representatives would even accompany Paul when he delivered the money to the Jerusalem church (8:16-24).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:1**

- Paul's great tact with the Corinthians should be noted. Although Paul planned to ask the Corinthians to collect money for the impoverished Jerusalem Christians, he first presented them with an illustration of admirable generosity: the giving of the Macedonians.
- From the start, Paul gave God the glory for the ability and the desire to give. Human nature motivates people to hoard wealth (**Luke 12:18-21**). Only when Christians are walking in the Spirit and trust God for all their needs (**Matthew 6:28-34**), can they freely give out of what God has given them (**Matthew 10:8**). Not only are material possessions gifts from God, but also the willingness to give is a gift from God. God's free grace, His undeserved favor, motivates us to give our time, money, and talents.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:2.**

- Paul had founded the Macedonian churches on his second missionary journey. At Philippi, Paul and Silas had been harassed, stripped, and severely beaten (**Acts 16:22-24**). At Thessalonica, a mob had searched the city for Paul and Silas. Fortunately, they

didn't find them. Instead, they had dragged Jason, a prominent Thessalonian believer, before the city council (**Acts 17:5-7**). The Thessalonian Jews who had stirred up trouble for Paul in their city had followed Paul to Berea, trying to silence him (**Acts 17:13-15**). So although Jesus had called Paul and his fellow evangelists to Macedonia, they had experienced opposition to the preaching of the gospel everywhere they went (**Acts 16:6-10**).

- From Paul's letters to the Thessalonians and to the Philippians, it appears this persecution did not subside after Paul's initial visit. The Macedonian Christians had experienced a severe ordeal of affliction at the hands of their own people. (**Philippians 1:29-30; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:1-2, 14**). Because of their endurance, the Thessalonians had become a model for Christians throughout Greece (**1 Thessalonians 1:7**). Paul boasted of their perseverance in the faith in the face of great persecution (**2 Thessalonians 1:4**). The mention of them to the Corinthians here is only one of the occasions when he commended the Macedonian believers. He also spoke of their generosity to the Roman Christians (**Romans 15:26**).
- Although the Macedonians had experienced great affliction and extreme poverty, they still gave generously and joyfully. Their joy overflowed in a wealth of generosity.

## Read 2 Corinthians 8:3-4

- Paul continued to praise the Macedonians for their attitude about giving. Apparently, the Macedonians had calculated how much they could give and then looked to the Lord to exceed that amount. Their giving was beyond what Paul could expect. In fact,

Paul had been reluctant to ask for money for the Jerusalem Christians. It was the Macedonians who had urgently pleaded with Paul to take their gift.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:5.**

- The Macedonians' giving was not motivated by a self-centered desire for praise from Paul or others. Their generosity was motivated by Christ Himself as the Holy Spirit was reproducing His life within them. They were not looking for recognition and congratulations from others. They weren't doing it to feel good about themselves. They gave because Christ within was giving them the power and desire to do so (**Philippians 2:13**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:6.**

- Paul sent Titus back to Corinth and encouraged the believers to complete their ministry of giving.
- On a previous visit, Titus had encouraged the Corinthians to continue collecting finances each week for the Jerusalem church, for Paul had instructed the Corinthians to do that in an earlier letter (**1 Corinthians 16:1-4**). Apparently, the Corinthians' giving had dwindled.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:7.**

- Paul once again appealed to the Corinthians through encouraging words. They had excelled in so many ways as God had gifted them with a wealth of spiritual gifts (**1 Corinthians 1:4**).

- Knowing the Corinthians truly understood and valued spiritual gifts, Paul placed giving alongside other gifts (**Romans 12:8**). Paul wanted the Corinthians to excel also in this gracious ministry of giving—being concerned for the needs of others.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:8.**

- Giving is a natural response of true, biblical faith and Christian love. Paul did not order the Corinthians to give; he encouraged them to show the sincerity of their faith in Christ and love for Him by comparing it with the eagerness of others. When we are abiding in Christ, we just naturally want to give our time, our attention, and our possessions.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:9.**

- Paul here gives the Corinthian church two models of generous giving. In the previous verse and first part of this chapter (8:1-5, 8), Paul had given them the first model: the poor Macedonian Christians who had enthusiastically given beyond what they could afford. Then in this verse, Paul gave the Corinthians another model: Jesus Himself. Although the Macedonians had shown a great amount of generosity, their sacrifice couldn't compare with Jesus' giving of Himself. Jesus' action was the ultimate model for the Corinthians.
- Jesus became poor for the Corinthians' sakes by generously giving up His rights and privileges as God and becoming human. Although He was God and possessed all the privileges, power, and wisdom of God (John 1:1-14), the Son of God relinquished all that. He voluntarily became a man named Jesus of

Nazareth. He was a heavenly King, and He humbled Himself to become a servant of lowly human beings. He even voluntarily surrendered himself to death on a cross, the most cruel and humiliating death known at that time. Yet by doing so, He made all who believe in Him rich. Christians have not only been saved through His selfless actions, they have also been accepted into God's family (5:8, 18) and given a glorious, eternal inheritance in heaven (4:18; 5:1).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:10-11.**

- Paul was careful not to command the Corinthians (8:8); he only gave advice, made an appeal.
- They had begun or started the fund for the relief of the Jerusalem Christians and now Paul asked the Corinthians to finish the work and fulfill the giving so that their eager willingness at the beginning would match their completion of the task (9:5). He encouraged the Corinthians to act on their plans and give according to their means (8:14).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:12.**

- Paul wasn't concerned about the amount the Corinthians would raise, he just wanted them to give. When he spoke of the Macedonians' giving, he did not tell the Corinthians how much the Macedonians had given but how they had given: they gave with great joy, motivated by Christ within (8:2-3, 5). Paul was more concerned about the spiritual condition of the Corinthians than reaching a goal in fund-raising.

- Although what the Corinthians possessed was a gift from God (**1 Corinthians 4:7**), Paul asked them to give of what they had, not what they didn't have.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 8:13-14.**

- Paul wanted the Corinthians to give generously but not to the extent that those who were depending on the givers (their families, for example) must suffer from having too little.
- The Jerusalem Christians had been poor for some time. About a decade before this collection, the believers in Antioch had sent Paul and Barnabas with some monetary relief for the church at Jerusalem. Palestine had been hit with a severe famine, and apparently the believers in Jerusalem were in great need (**Acts 11:27-30**). Most likely, the Jerusalem Christians remained extremely poor because they were basically social outcasts. Right from the start, the Jews (headed at that time by Paul himself) had undertaken an intense campaign of persecution against Jewish Christians (**Acts 5:17-18; 7:54-60; 8:1-3**). The early Christians had to flee Jerusalem to avoid imprisonment or a worse fate. Naturally, persecution of that sort would disrupt the businesses of those Christians. Apparently, the Christians in and around Jerusalem had limited ways to support themselves, even a decade later.
- Paul considered the poverty of the Jerusalem Christians as an opportunity for Gentile believers. They could dispel any doubts about the genuineness of their faith by demonstrating it through giving generously to the Jerusalem church—the church that had sacrificed in the beginning to send evangelists throughout the Roman world (**Romans 15:25-27**).

Paul hoped their generosity would smooth over some of the hesitancy of some Jewish Christians to accept Gentiles into the church. **Acts 21:15-25** explains Paul's defense of his ministry with the Gentiles at the presentation of the gift.

- In the end, the hope was that the giving and the receiving of money would help to tie the entire church together. Each would be dependent on the other. Just as the Gentiles had been dependent on the Jewish Christians for the wonderful message of salvation, the Jews would be dependent on the Gentiles for financial support. Each one's need would be met with the other's strength, so the entire church would be built up. If one local church was wealthy, it could help another poor local body. When conditions reversed, the formerly poor church might be able to return the favor.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:15.**

- Paul quoted **Exodus 16:18** to illustrate how everyone's needs would be met. In the wilderness, the Israelites could not find enough food to feed all of their number. So God provided food from heaven: manna. These thin, white flakes appeared on the ground every morning. God told the Israelites to gather as much as they needed for the day. Some gathered more than others, but each had enough for the day. Those who were greedy tried to store the manna for the next day. They didn't trust God for what they needed. Their lack of trust was rewarded with a smelly, maggot-ridden mess (**Exodus 16:19**).
- Although God didn't supply the first-century Christians' needs the same way, Paul saw the same principles at work. God would provide everyone with

what they needed. Although some had more and others had less, everyone's needs would be met in the end.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:16-17.**

- The rest of Chapter 8 is, in essence, a letter of recommendation for Titus and two anonymous “brothers.” Titus was an official representative of Paul, while the “brothers” were representatives of churches who had contributed to the Jerusalem fund (8:18, 22).
- Paul first commended Titus to the Corinthians. He had already emphasized how encouraged Titus was after his initial visit with them (7:13-15). The Corinthians had welcomed Titus, had respected his message to them, and had even provided for his needs (7:7, 15). When Paul asked him to visit Corinth again, Titus welcomed Paul's request that he visit the Corinthians again. He had the same enthusiasm as Paul, thus Paul thanked God for Titus's willingness to be involved in this way.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:18-19.**

- Paul took some steps to guard the integrity of the Jerusalem collection. A brother had been chosen by the churches to ensure that the money would be given to its intended recipients.
- This brother would function as a representative for the churches to ensure that the money of the Jerusalem collection would be handled properly. Paul did not want anyone to accuse him of mishandling this gift for the Jerusalem Christians, for that would defeat his

entire purpose. The gift was to promote unity in the early church, not division (**Romans 15:25-27**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:20-21.**

- Paul didn't want anyone to be suspicious of his handling of the money. Therefore, he was careful that his actions were not only honorable before the Lord, who saw all things, but also before people, who look on the appearance of things (**Proverbs 3:4**). That is why he had refused financial support from the Corinthians when he had first ministered among them (**1 Corinthians 9:12**).
- In order to finish the collection without any suspicion, Paul continued to refrain from collecting the money himself. Instead, he sent Titus whom the Corinthians respected and trusted. Accompanying Titus were two other representatives from the churches who contributed to the fund to oversee how the money was handled.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:22.**

- Paul recommended the third brother to the Corinthians. Although Paul didn't mention this person's name, he made it clear that the man had proven himself.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:23.**

- The last two verses of this chapter summarize Paul's recommendation of Titus and his two traveling companions. Although Paul called Titus his son in the faith in Titus 1:4, here he called Titus a partner and fellow worker in the preaching of the gospel. Paul did

this in order to emphasize Titus' authority among the Corinthians. Titus was Paul's official representative to the Corinthians.

- The two representatives of the churches who accompanied Titus were also recommended by Paul to the Corinthians (the list of representatives is given in **Acts 20:4**). The Greek for “representatives” is *apostoloi*—literally, apostles. In the Gospels, this Greek word is only used for the Twelve. Paul in his letters, however, used the term for any representative of a church commissioned for some special task (Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 9:5; James in Galatians 1:19). *Apostolos* literally means “the one sent forth.”

### **Read 2 Corinthians 8:24.**

- Paul told the Corinthians to shower their Christian love on these fellow believers, just as they had welcomed Titus before (7:7, 13). These men were representing the other churches; therefore, the Corinthians should conduct themselves in an appropriate way, for their conduct would be broadcasted to other churches by these representatives. The fact that Paul spent so much time recommending these emissaries and their mission to the Corinthians might indicate that Paul was a little apprehensive of how the Corinthians would treat them. Paul's last visit was especially painful (2:1-4). Perhaps that visit was still on his mind, even though Titus had given him an encouraging report (7:6-7).

## **LESSON 9**

### **2 Corinthians 9**

#### **CHEERFUL GIVERS—9:1-15**

This passage reminds the Corinthians of their initial enthusiasm for the Jerusalem collection, as well as their delight that God could use them to help other believers. Their enthusiasm was contagious. The Macedonians had heard of their eagerness and had also eagerly responded to the appeal for money. As Paul was preparing to collect the last of the contributions, however, the Corinthians' enthusiasm had waned.

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-2.**

- Paul had been boasting to the Christians in Macedonia about the Corinthians' eagerness to help. It was word of the Corinthians' eagerness that stirred the Macedonians to want to give so generously (8:1-5).
- By describing how their own enthusiasm had incited the Macedonians to give, Paul was, in effect, prodding the Corinthians to rekindle their initial enthusiasm for giving. Paul wasn't naive about human behavior. The start and end of a marathon are much more thrilling than the miles in between. It takes Christ-motivated determination and perseverance to keep on running—to run, in spite of the blisters, sore muscles, and exhaustion.
- Paul hoped his description of how the Macedonians had given out of their extreme poverty (8:2-3) would “stir” the Corinthians to action, just as word of the Corinthians' eagerness had stirred the Macedonians. Paul sent Titus and two others to oversee the collection efforts (9:4-5).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:3.**

- Paul didn't want his boasts about the Corinthians to be empty, so he sent Titus with two other representatives (brothers). In several months, Paul would return to Jerusalem with the money (**Acts 20:1-5, 22-24; 24:17**); therefore, he requested that the final contribution be ready when he came to Corinth (9:4). Titus' ministry was to teach the grace of giving and trust that the Lord would work in their hearts to give as Paul had instructed in **1 Corinthians 16:1-4**. The respected and trustworthy representatives who accompanied Titus were to ensure that no underhanded methods would be used (2:17).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:4.**

- Paul would follow Titus accompanied by delegates from the Macedonian churches. The Macedonian church representatives would just naturally compare the generosity of their own churches to that of the Corinthians. Paul had told the Macedonians how the Corinthians had eagerly wanted to give from the beginning (about a year before). But since then, much had changed. So Paul mentioned to the Corinthians how he would be humiliated if the Corinthians were unprepared for his visit. On the surface, Paul was speaking about the Jerusalem collection, but he may have been warning the Corinthians of other concerns. Paul was hoping the Macedonians would not find the Corinthian church in spiritual disorder. That would be even more of a concern. The end of this letter will state it more clearly where Paul would warn the Corinthians to prepare themselves for his visit by examining their hearts before God. When he came, he would mediate their disputes and even discipline

those who were sinning (13:1-5). If they doubted his authority, he would give them convincing proof of his authority from God (13:3-4).

- Of course, Paul hoped that this letter (2 Corinthians) delivered by Titus himself would prompt the Corinthians to make the necessary changes in the way they lived out their faith. Paul also knew human nature, however, so he took the necessary precautions, sending Titus to prod them on, not only in collecting the funds but also in their spiritual maturity. Paul's reference in this verse to being humiliated or ashamed was a gentle goad to the Corinthians.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:5.**

- Evidently, the Corinthians had pledged a great deal of money a year ago, for Paul called the gift a bountiful one. Paul wasn't asking for more money; he was merely reminding the Corinthians to fulfill the commitments they had already made (8:10-12).
- Paul, however, didn't want this amount of money to be collected under pressure or in a short time period because his appearance at Corinth would then be associated with a frenzied collection effort. Instead, Paul wanted the money to be given voluntarily, not forced in any way (**Philemon 1:8-9**). Titus and the two traveling brothers would go to Corinth before Paul's visit to arrange in advance the collection of the funds.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:6.**

- The people of this time were intimately familiar with the principles of an agricultural economy. Planting, weeding, and harvesting were common, everyday

tasks. Everyone would have known of a foolish neighbor who had used up all of his grain instead of saving some as seed for his fields. They would also know that the farmer who scattered his seed meagerly inevitably would have a small harvest, and any farmer who refused to risk his grain on the next year's harvest would lose.

- This piece of agricultural wisdom contains a profound truth about Christian giving (**Proverbs 11:24-26; 22:8-9**). Those who are like the foolish farmer who sowed sparingly—those who refuse to trust God with their future financial security and sow generously—are basically failing to invest in an eternal harvest that will exceed their expectations.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:7.**

- Each Corinthian believer was to decide what amount God wanted him or her to give. It wasn't to be an impulsive decision but a prayerfully considered one. They were to assess their God-given ability to give and, by God's grace, do so. This was to be intentional, planned giving because Paul had already told them to lay aside an amount every week (**1 Corinthians 16:1-4**).
- Even though Paul was the one appealing for the money, he was careful to give the Corinthians enough time to think and to pray about how much God wanted them to give. Paul didn't want anyone to give reluctantly or under compulsion. Paul knew that God looks on the heart and not the amount of money. A cheerful giver gives in the Spirit.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:8.**

- The purpose of God’s unmerited favor (grace) is to equip His people to do “***every good work.***” This text doesn’t imply that Christian giving is a contract with God where the one who gives gets. Instead, it says that God will provide whatever a Christian needs to do good. Notice the 5 “absolutes” in this verse:
  - All grace
  - You always
  - Having all sufficiency
  - All things
  - Every good work
- Paul makes it clear that God will provide whatever is needed for “***every good work.***” Therefore, if the resources aren’t there, the question should be, “Is this a good work?”

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:9.**

- Just as a farmer must scatter the seed on the ground in order to reap an abundant harvest, so Christians must scatter what they possess among the poor in order to reap a spiritual harvest. All of God’s gifts, both spiritual and material, are intended to enable Christians to do God’s good work (9:8). This quote from **Psalms 112:9** demonstrates this truth and emphasizes the **spiritual** benefits of generosity to the poor. Paul attaches eternal value to giving.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:10.**

- God supplies both the seed and the bread, both the surplus to give and the resources to support one’s family every day. The resources God gives Christians are not to be hoarded, foolishly devoured, or thrown

away. God gives gifts to His people for their own use and for giving back into God's work.

- God does not limit Himself to merely giving more resources, more "seed." He blesses what you sow. He showers the seed with gentle rain. He gives the seed that is sown everything it needs to grow into a healthy, thriving plant. Although the seed is small, it has great potential if it has the right conditions to grow (**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23, 31-32**).
- In the same way, God blesses believers' feeble attempts at generosity so that they enlarge the harvest. This harvest does not consist of personal wealth and riches, but rather it is a harvest of righteousness. God will take man's God-given opportunities to do good works and increase them so that they bless many people.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:11-12.**

- Giving generously causes two good things. First, through gifts given to those who are in need, God meets their needs (here, specifically, the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem). Second, the recipients of these generous gifts will give thanks to God.
- So, in Paul's eyes, giving is not a strategy for financial growth but another way to bring praise and honor to God, who supplies everyone's needs.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:13.**

- In addition to the normal advantages that come through Christian giving (9:11-12), Paul hoped that the Jerusalem collection would have extra benefits. He hoped that through this gift from Gentile

Christians Jewish and Gentile believers would be drawn closer together in Christian fellowship.

- Concern and care for the poor is essential to true biblical Christianity.
- One of the directives of the Jerusalem Council was that Gentile Christians shouldn't forget the poor (**Galatians 2:10**). The Gentiles' generous gift to the Jerusalem poor gave evidence that they were true believers (**James 2:14-18**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 9:14.**

- The collection for the Jerusalem believers would not only demonstrate the sincerity of the Corinthians' faith, but it would also tie the Christian community of faith closer together. Why would any Gentile, whether a Galatian or a Greek, give generously to the Jews in Jerusalem? Many of the Jews were not even citizens of the Roman Empire. They were a poor minority group within the empire.
- This generous gift might be the one thing that would prompt these Jews to start praying for the Corinthian believers for the first time. Just as the Corinthians' prayers for Paul made them partners with him in sharing the gospel (1:11), so these prayers of Jewish Christians would make them partners with Gentile believers. Through the Jerusalem collection, Jesus would begin to unite Jews and Gentiles into one body, the church (**Galatians 3:28**). They were all becoming part of Jesus' body; each was dependent on the other. The entire community of faith, Jewish and Gentile Christians, was being built up in love.

## Read 2 Corinthians 9:15.

- Paul ended his appeal for giving with fervent praise to God. The source of all this, the ability to give, the desire to give, even the reconciliation that would occur between Jewish and Gentile believers, was solely from God's hands. God is the ultimate Giver.
- Paul used the Greek word for "gift" that is commonly used for Jesus' gift of salvation (**Romans 5:15**). Paul was thanking God here for Jesus' gift of salvation. That God freely saves all those who believe in Jesus is truly an "*indescribable gift*."

## **LESSON 10**

### **2 Corinthians 10**

#### **PAUL'S AUTHORITY IS DISCREDITED—10:1-18**

Although Paul and the Corinthians had been reconciled to a certain extent (7:7, 12-16), there were persistent problems in their relationship. Whatever the exact cause of Paul's change of tone in Chapter 10, it is obvious certain difficulties in the Corinthian church deserved a more harsh tone. Paul had already cautiously defended his authority (3:1-6), his ministry (5:19-21), and his integrity (8:20). He had already commended the Corinthians for their hospitality (7:13) and their eagerness to give (9:2). At this point in 2 Corinthians, Paul was ready to admonish the Corinthians to change their ways (11:3-4, 12-14; 13:5).

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:1.**

- Although most of the Corinthian congregation sided with Paul (as is evident from 7:8-16), a persistent minority continued to slander him. The group attacked Paul's integrity by pointing out that he was bold in his letters but timid in person; in other words, reluctant to exercise any authority when he visited them. Paul's critics saw this as an indication that Paul truly didn't possess the spiritual authority he claimed. Chapters 10 through 13 are Paul's direct response to his critics in Corinth.
- Jesus Christ was Paul's model in the approach he took here. Although Jesus possessed complete heavenly authority, He came to this earth as a servant (Philippians 2:5-11). Instead of commanding obedience and respect, Jesus simply asks for people to believe in Him. Following Christ's example, the

apostle Paul, who possessed full authority from Jesus (2:17; 5:19), merely pleaded with the Corinthians.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:2.**

- Here Paul explained why he was writing this letter. He was hoping and praying that when he came, everything would be in order in the church (13:7). Paul had already said he wasn't writing to condemn them (7:3). Instead, he was writing so that when he came to Corinth, he wouldn't have to spend his time disciplining the errant members of the Corinthian church when he could be building them up and encouraging them in the Lord (13:10). This was the same reason that Paul had postponed his visit to Corinth in the first place (2:1-2). He wanted to give the Corinthians enough time to deal with the difficulties in their church on their own.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:3.**

- In this verse the Greek word *sarx*, commonly translated "flesh," can be translated here as "human plans and methods."
- Paul lived in a human body, yet he knew not to wage spiritual war with human plans and methods. As he would do in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul equated the Christian life to a war. This war isn't "***against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms***" (Ephesians 6:12). The Christian life is a spiritual battle against spiritual forces aligned against Christ. Fighting this spiritual battle with weapons of the world—with physical strength,

worldly strategies, and material wealth—would be foolish. A spiritual battle requires spiritual weapons that can only come from God (**2 Chronicles 20:15**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.**

- According to Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, God's spiritual armor/weapons are faith, truth, righteousness, the gospel, salvation, and the Word of God. The Holy Spirit equips Christians by providing the weapons they need (**Ephesians 6:10-20**).
- Carnal, worldly weapons—wealth, fame, and political might—may wield some power on this earth, but they are useless in spiritual battles. Trickery and deception may be effective in dealing with some people, but only truth believed will achieve success in the spiritual realm.
- Paul didn't consider the mighty Roman armies or the Roman emperor to be true strongholds (**Proverbs 21:22**). Instead, he saw the spiritual weapons of God as the only way to pull down fleshly strongholds and cast down fleshly imagination (I wonder where she is now? I wonder who he's with tonight?) Paul described "*high things*" as being raised up "*against the knowledge of God.*" Paul wasn't referring to a tall building but to every proud thought that says, "I don't need God."
- In Corinth, where advances in Greek philosophy were held in high esteem, the believers were tempted to evaluate the gospel with the various tools of Greek philosophy. In an earlier letter, Paul had already told the Corinthians that the gospel would appear as foolishness to those who saw the world through the lenses of secular Greek philosophy (**1 Corinthians 1:22**). Paul had experienced this himself. When he

had presented the gospel to the philosophers who gathered in Athens, they had responded with insults and taunts (**Acts 17:32**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:6.**

- This spells out what this divine arsenal would mean to the Corinthian church. Paul wouldn't hesitate on his next visit to use those spiritual weapons entrusted to him to expose and root out those who remained disobedient.
- But notice that Paul attached a condition to his exercising of his authority. He would not do so until the Corinthian believers became obedient to the faith. According to Titus's recent report, the majority of the Corinthians had already done this. They had been filled with godly sorrow about the recent problems in their church and had made the necessary steps toward reconciling themselves to Paul (7:7-13). From the way Paul carefully defended his ministry in this letter (1:12-18; 3:1-5; 5:11-17), it is clear that there was still a rebellious minority in the church (2:17). At the end of this letter, Paul promised to deal sternly with this minority on his next visit. Paul couldn't stand by and watch these "false apostles" (11:13) mislead the church anymore.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:7.**

- The Corinthians had been looking only on the surface of things, listening intently to the false teachers who were boasting of themselves, their own authority (10:12-13), their perfect Hebrew heritage (11:21-22), and their visionary experiences (12:11-12). All of their boasts and extravagant displays of power had

dazzled the Corinthians so much that they had become blind to the simplicity of the gospel message that Paul had preached to them (**1 Corinthians 2:1-3**).

- *“If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ’s, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ’s, even so we are Christ’s.”* The false teachers who had infiltrated the Corinthian church were claiming to be teachers of Christ. Since they were from Judea (11:21-22), their claims may have included some knowledge or acquaintance with Jesus during His ministry on earth. Paul matched their claim to belong to Christ. The Corinthians would have known about Paul’s personal encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, the encounter that had changed Paul forever (**Acts 9:1-10**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:8.**

- Although Paul’s opponents had portrayed him as weak and powerless, Paul reminded the Corinthians that he did possess God-given authority (1:21-22; 5:20-21). Although he would not boast in himself or compare himself to other preachers, he would boast in the Lord and in the authority that Jesus had given him to preach the gospel that saves (10:12-13, 17-18; **1 Corinthians 1:31**).
- Paul’s mission was constructive, not destructive. That is why he had hesitated to visit them. Paul was afraid that his visit would cause more pain than was necessary (1:23-24; 12:19-21).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:9.**

- Paul's last letter to the Corinthians had been harsh. Paul had cried over it (2:3-4). The letter was necessary, however, because Paul had to work through some troublesome situations in the church.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:10.**

- Greece was known for its eloquent and persuasive orators. Corinth, a prominent Greek city at this time, was filled with trained speakers. Apparently, some of the Corinthian believers were judging Paul's speaking ability. He had already admitted to the Corinthians that he had consciously avoided dependence on rhetoric or human philosophy when he had presented the gospel of salvation to them (**1 Corinthians 2:1-3**). He wanted the message to speak for itself, unencumbered by such distractions.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:11.**

- In the past, Paul had refrained from disciplining members of the Corinthian church in person. He had warned them to stop sinning (13:2) on several occasions and had written letters encouraging them to discipline persistent sinners (**1 Corinthians 5:1-5**). Paul had used these indirect methods to encourage the leaders of the Corinthian church to take charge of the situation and discipline their own members. Because his more accommodating approach wasn't working with the Corinthians, however, Paul assured them that on his next visit he would exercise his authority (13:3-4), disciplining those who had not taken his warnings to heart earlier (13:1-2).

## **Read 2 Corinthians 10:12.**

- Here Paul went on the offensive. Although his critics had dared to commend themselves, Paul would not dare compare himself with them or anyone else. Any ability he possessed was a gift from God; therefore, God deserved the full credit for it.
- However, Paul's opponents in Corinth didn't shrink from comparing themselves with one another. In so doing, they were robbing God of the glory that was due to him (10:17). Instead of waiting for God to commend them, they were praising themselves. Paul, who refrained from any boasting, was accused by the Corinthians of being "unimpressive" (10:10). Although the Corinthians claimed to be wise, they didn't recognize that the boasts of Paul's opponents were foolish (10:17-18). Because of the power these false teachers were gaining in the congregation, Paul was finally forced to make it clear. These teachers were foolish.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 10:13.**

- Because the Corinthians had listened to these false teachers, they were forcing Paul to boast in order to silence his critics (11:1–12:13). Here Paul explained the grounds on which he was boasting. To boast in himself and in his own accomplishments would have been entirely inappropriate. Only God deserved honor, for he had given Paul his abilities.
- What could Paul boast about? He could only boast in God and in the ministry God had assigned him. Paul regarded his ministry at Corinth as within his God-given limits. Apparently, Paul saw the false teachers as usurping the responsibilities God had

assigned to him. Paul was expressing that Corinth was well within the field or territory that God had measured out to him.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:14.**

- How did Paul know that God had given him Corinth as part of his ministry? It was because Paul and his companions were the first to come to the Corinthians with the gospel. He was the founder of the Corinthian church, and as such could exercise authority over the congregation. But Paul had another reason for considering the Corinthians well within his limits. The Holy Spirit had commissioned him as a missionary to the Gentiles (**Acts 22:21**). The Christian leaders in Jerusalem had confirmed his commission: “*They saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews.*” (**Galatians 2:7**)
- It is clear that Paul’s primary concern was that these teachers were misleading the believers in Corinth. Paul had welcomed in the past any teacher of the truth, such as Apollos, to build on the foundation he had laid (**1 Corinthians 3:5-13**). In the final analysis, however, the Corinthians had only one founder: Paul himself (**1 Corinthians 4:14-16**). If anyone could claim authority over the Corinthian congregation, he could. It was his authority that was being called into question.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:15-16.**

- Paul refused to boast in the fruit of the labors of other evangelists as the false teachers were doing with the Corinthians.

- Paul envisioned his evangelistic ministry as expanding into new areas. He would never plan on invading regions that had already been evangelized by some other teacher. In order to do this, however, the Corinthians' faith had to increase. As they matured in the faith, Paul could enlarge his sphere of ministry. As mature Christians, they would not only be less dependent on Paul to solve their congregation's problems, but they would also be used by Paul to help launch evangelistic missions beyond them into completely unevangelized areas. From Paul's letter to the Romans, we know that Paul's vision included reaching Spain with the Good News (**Romans 15:24**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:17-18.**

- The following chapters list some of Paul's ministerial credentials and accomplishments. Paul was extremely cautious about boasting about himself—first of all, so that he might not rob the honor that God deserved (11:30-31), and secondly so that he might not be misunderstood as being proud (5:12-13; 10:13; 11:16-18). The situation in Corinth, however, had forced Paul to set aside his desires about boasting in order to save the Corinthian church from ruin.

## **LESSON 11**

### **2 Corinthians 11**

#### **PAUL AND THE FALSE APOSTLES—11:1-15**

Because the Corinthians were easily impressed by résumés (11:21-23), articulate and persuasive speakers (11:6), and shows of spiritual power (12:12), they had been deceived by a group of false teachers. By consistently criticizing and accusing Paul, these false teachers had undermined Paul's authority in Corinth. Paul felt obligated to respond to their criticisms, point by point (11:21). He had founded the church and had the responsibility to keep the church on the right course (**1 Corinthians 4:15**).

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:1.**

- Paul asked the Corinthian believers to be patient and bear with him as he spoke of his apostolic credentials. There shouldn't be any reason for the Corinthians to question him; he was their father in the Christian faith (**1 Corinthians 4:15**). But because the Corinthians had been taken in by these false teachers, their claims to ecstatic spiritual experiences, and deceived by their logic, Paul sensed a need to speak as a fool to remind them of what he had done in the ministry. It was against his desire to do this, for all honor, glory, and even boasting belongs to God (10:17). Yet Paul was in a dilemma. If he didn't speak up, the false teachers in Corinth might continue to lead the Corinthian believers astray. Paul had hoped the believers would discern the emptiness of these false teachers' boasts, but they had not. As a spokesman for truth, therefore, Paul couldn't stay silent; he sensed a need to speak up. In

this case, speaking up for the truth meant defending his own credentials. If his own ministry was discredited, the gospel he preached would also be discredited.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:2.**

- Paul's desire was that the Corinthian's love should be reserved for Christ alone, just as a chaste virgin saves her love for her groom. In the first century, an engagement was a serious commitment, similar to a contract. If the bride wasn't a virgin on the wedding day, it was considered a breach of the engagement contract. Ensuring the bride's purity and virginity until the wedding day was partially her father's responsibility.
- Paul had already described himself as the Corinthians' spiritual father (**1 Corinthians 4:15**). This passage reveals his concern for the Corinthians as a father's concern for the purity of his daughter. Paul had already promised the Corinthians as a pure bride to one husband, Christ. He was anticipating that wonderful day when he would present them proudly to Jesus.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:3.**

- Eve represents innocence and purity. This passage compares the serpent's temptation to the temptation of the false teachers' enticing message. The Corinthians had begun their Christian walk with a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. But false teachers were luring Corinthian believers away from the truth. Paul didn't want the believers' single-minded love for Christ to be corrupted.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 11:4.**

- The false teachers who had come to Corinth had distorted the truth about Jesus and ended up preaching a different Jesus, a different spirit than the Holy Spirit, and a different gospel than God's way of salvation.
- Exactly how the false teaching was different from the gospel Paul preached has intrigued biblical scholars for centuries. Because Paul spent most of his time in this letter defending his authority instead of addressing any doctrinal errors, 2 Corinthians offers few clues.
- Apparently, the false teachers were boasting of their superior credentials (3:1; 11:22), their speaking ability (10:10; 11:6), and their ecstatic spiritual experiences (12:1, 12). They had begun to compare their ministry to Paul's, speaking against his abilities and credentials in order to highlight their own competence.
- The false teachers were distracting the Corinthians from the grace of God, the only thing that could save them; notice Paul's emphasis on grace (1:12; 6:1; 9:8; 12:9). These false teachers' message, reasoning, and boasts were drawing attention to themselves instead of pointing the Corinthians to God.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 11:5-6.**

- Paul, a brilliant thinker, apparently was not a great speaker. Although Paul's preaching ministry was effective (Acts 17), he had not been trained in the Greek schools of oratory and speechmaking, as the false teachers evidently had been. In fact, Paul avoided fine-sounding arguments and lofty ideas in

order to preach the simple gospel message (**1 Corinthians 1:17**). Some of the Corinthians had begun to think that Paul's plain speaking style indicated a simple-mindedness.

- Paul couldn't compete with the polished orators at Corinth, and he didn't want to. Their message would be applauded while his simple message would be scorned (see the response of the Greek philosophers in **Acts 17:32**). No matter what the response, the message Paul preached was still the message of God's salvation, a message that the Holy Spirit would use to save people from their sins and transform their lives (**Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:1-8**).
- Despite what his accusers said, Paul claimed that he did possess knowledge, but it wasn't the knowledge of the world and its ways.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:7.**

- The Corinthians evaluated a speaker by how much money he demanded from his audience. A good speaker would charge a large sum; a fair speaker would be less; a poor speaker would speak for free. Since Paul hadn't asked for money when he preached in Corinth, some were accusing him of being an amateur speaker.
- In 1 Corinthians Paul had made it clear that he could have demanded a wage or financial support, but he had chosen to forego any payment in order to offer the gospel free of charge. Jesus himself had taught that godly ministers could expect to be financially supported by the people to whom they ministered (**Matthew 10:10**).

- Instead of asking for a fee, Paul supported himself by manual labor, working as a tentmaker with Priscilla and Aquila (**Acts 18:1-3**). Prominent Greeks considered manual labor as beneath them. In Greek-Roman society, it was more honorable for a traveling teacher to beg than it was for him to stoop to demeaning manual labor. In contrast, the Jews respected manual labor. In fact, Jewish rabbis, teachers of the law, were required to support themselves with some kind of trade. Thus, when Paul supported himself as a tentmaker, he was following his rabbinical training.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:8-9.**

- Why did Paul accept support from the Macedonian Christians and refuse it from the Corinthians? Part of the answer to this question is that the Macedonians were giving cheerfully (8:1-5). The Corinthians, on the other hand, were accusing Paul of trying to “exploit” them (12:17). The Macedonians wanted to give freely, while the Corinthians were using their money to gain influence and power. So there would be no question about his motivations, Paul would continue to refuse compensation. The Macedonians weren’t questioning his authority, but the Corinthians were.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:10-11.**

- Paul knew that the fact he hadn’t taken any money from the Corinthians was the strongest rebuttal to the false teachers, for their whole purpose in preaching was to gather a following who would support them (2:17). Paul hoped his consistent integrity with

money would be one of the indicators that he was a preacher of the truth, while his opponents were greedy peddlers of falsehoods (2:17).

- Why did Paul refuse support? Why did he boast in his own integrity? Why did he oppose the false teachers? It was because of his deep love for the Corinthians. As the founder of the church of Corinth, Paul was concerned for the Corinthians' spiritual welfare. He was jealous for their spiritual purity (1:6, 23; 2:10).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:12.**

- Although Paul was being forced to boast foolishly about his own ministry, it was his consistent honesty and integrity and the way he had conducted himself that would silence his critics and answer their charges against him. These new preachers wanted to be recognized as “super-apostles” (11:5); but in reality, they could not be considered Paul's equals.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:13.**

- Paul reserved some of the harshest language for those who were boasting about their ministry among the Corinthians: They were “*false apostles*” and “*deceitful workers*.”
- The conflict these false teachers caused in the Corinthian church, their self-serving methods, and their criticism of God's teachers should have prompted the Corinthians to inspect the message thoroughly. A careful analysis would have revealed that it was “different” from the true gospel that Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Apollos had preached (11:4-5).

- The Corinthian believers should have tested the teachers to see whether they believed Jesus is the Son of God (**1 John 4:1-2**). The Corinthians had failed to do this.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:14.**

- Paul wasn't amazed that false teachers were disguising themselves as preachers of God, for Satan himself had deceived God's people in similar ways.
- Paul had already warned the Corinthians (2:11; **1 Corinthians 7:5**). Here, Paul compared the false teachers' deception with Satan's actions.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:15.**

- Although these false teachers claimed to be servants of God's righteousness, they were servants of Satan, the god of this age (4:4). Their actions betrayed them. Instead of exalting Christ and bringing glory to God, they were boasting in their own achievements, preaching for money, teaching a twisted gospel of another Jesus (11:4). In the end, their fraud would be exposed.

### **PAUL'S MANY TRIALS—11:16-33**

***“Are they ministers of Christ? [...] I am more”*** (11:23). This was Paul's ultimate rebuttal.

If the greedy teachers of Corinth questioned Paul's authority, he questioned their devotion to Christ. They were enjoying the luxuries of one of the most prominent cities in the Roman Empire, while Paul, as he noted in this passage, was enduring all kinds of hardships to

preach the gospel to those who hadn't heard. These teachers had been careful to collect correct references, respected credentials, and impeccable recommendations; but they, unlike Paul, had failed to, by grace through faith, present themselves to God as a living sacrifice (**Romans 12:1**).

## **Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-18.**

- Paul was extremely reluctant to do any boasting. He knew that pride in one's own accomplishments eventually leads to destruction (**Psalms 12:13; Proverbs 16:18**). Boasting robs God of the honor He deserves (**Psalms 96:8; 97:6**). Only God, the source of all wisdom, ability, and strength, can accept glory and praise (**Psalms 44:8; 1 Corinthians 1:31**).
- But faced with the persistent faultfinding of his critics, Paul sensed a need to speak up in order to quiet the gossip and slander circulating in the Corinthian church.
- Defending oneself against false accusations, however, isn't always the Christian response to slander. Jesus Himself remained silent in the face of His accusers (**Mark 14:61**). In this case, Paul thought a hardy defense of his actions would be appropriate.
- Paul wanted to make it clear to the Corinthians that boasting wasn't the proper behavior for a minister of the Lord. In effect, he was putting down his critics by boasting in his weaknesses instead of his strengths (11:30). He simply refused to enter into a bragging contest with his opponents (10:12). By freely admitting his weaknesses, Paul hoped to stop the foolish boasting and the competitive spirit that

pervaded the Corinthian congregation (1 Corinthians 3:18-23).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:19.**

- “*For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly.*” (NASB) With biting sarcasm, Paul reprimanded the Corinthians for putting up with these arrogant false teachers.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:20.**

- The Corinthians continued to listen to the false teachers even when it became clear they were trying to enslave the Corinthians. Paul went on to explain the nature of this enslavement.
- He begins by describing how the false teachers are devouring the Corinthians as animals devour their prey. The false teachers were traveling preachers looking for a gullible group of people to financially support them. They were literally preying on the Corinthians trying to exploit the relationship for financial gain.
- The oppressive methods of these false teachers should have revealed to the Corinthians their questionable motives. With arrogant boasts, they paraded their credentials and achievements. The false teachers were exalting themselves with their hollow boasts against not only Paul’s authority among the Corinthians but also against God himself.
- Finally, Paul described these false teachers as slapping the Corinthians in the face. In the first century, it was common for religious authorities to slap the face of a person who blasphemed (**Acts**

**23:2).** Apparently, these false teachers had the boldness to slap those who opposed them.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:21.**

- Paul could have been quoting what his critics said about him when he wrote that he was too weak to take advantage of the Corinthians. Even though Paul would refrain from doing that, he was going to dare to boast, just as his opponents did. Once again, Paul mentioned he felt foolish talking as he did, listing his accomplishments.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:22.**

- These statements appear to be addressing the charges Paul's opponents had leveled against him.
- First of all, these traveling preachers from Judea were bragging about being Hebrews and Israelites—God's chosen people. Paul had been born in Tarsus; and thus, in his opponents' eyes, he had a questionable heritage. Was Paul a pure Jew? Did he consider Judea his home? Did he understand the Hebrew language? Paul said yes. He was also one of the descendants of Abraham. He was descended from the tribe of Benjamin and thus was an Israelite. He had been circumcised eight days after he was born, a physical sign of his Israelite heritage. He had been trained by one of the most respected Pharisees of that day, Gamaliel. (**Philippians 3:4-6**). No one could question Paul's credentials as a Jew and as an expert in the Hebrew Scriptures.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:23.**

- These false teachers were not from Christ, as they claimed. To prove his point, Paul listed all the trials he suffered for Christ. Could his opponents, who boasted in achievements, accomplishments, and credentials, produce an extensive list of suffering and persecution endured for Christ's name? Were they willing to follow Jesus' way of the cross, His life of suffering? Were they willing to take up His cross daily and die to self (**Luke 9:23**)?
- Paul had demonstrated his willingness to endure suffering for the ministry, just as Jesus had called him to do (**Acts 9:15-16**). Paul had suffered the hardship of imprisonment, including floggings (**Acts 16:22-24**). He had faced death on a number of occasions (**Acts 14:16**). In fact, at the beginning of this letter, Paul explained he had come dangerously close to death in his recent travels in Asia Minor (1:9). Since this letter was written during Paul's third missionary journey (**Acts 18:23–21:17**), his trials weren't over. He would experience further difficulties and humiliations (**Acts 21:30-33; 22:24-30**). Paul was sacrificing physically for the spread of the gospel.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 11:24.**

- According to the Jewish law, punishment of forty lashes was the maximum number the Jews could prescribe (**Deuteronomy 25:3**). The rabbis, however, would only allow thirty-nine, so that if the flogger miscounted, he wouldn't accidentally sin by administering more than forty. These beatings were carried out in the synagogues and were for either moral or religious offenses. The lashes were made of

several straps of leather, sometimes with bone or metal tied to the ends to inflict more pain.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:25.**

- Only the Romans could administer beatings with rods. Yet Paul was beaten with rods at Philippi (**Acts 16:22**). Apparently, he had been beaten with rods on two other occasions (these weren't recorded in the book of Acts). Finally, at Lystra, Paul had survived a stoning (**Acts 14:8-20**).
- Paul had been shipwrecked three times, and he would face another shipwreck on his voyage to Rome (**Acts 27**). By this time, Paul had probably made at least eight or nine voyages. The fact that Paul survived twenty-four hours adrift at sea would have been considered miraculous in the first century, a sign of God's hand on his life.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:26.**

- The sea did not present the only danger Paul faced on his many journeys as he traveled to share the gospel all over the Mediterranean world. Bandits were a constant problem in the ancient world. The rocky road from Jerusalem to Jericho was one of the many roads considered especially dangerous. That may be why Jesus set his parable of the Good Samaritan on that road (Luke 10:30-37). The Corinthians, too, would have known of the dangers from bandits because the road that stretched from their city to Athens was known to harbor bandits, especially in the wilderness areas.

- In addition, Paul's own people, the Jews, were trying to orchestrate his downfall. When Paul first visited Corinth, the Jews had dragged him before the governor of Achaia in order to stop him from preaching (**Acts 18:12-17**). The Gentiles also had opposed Paul in Philippi and in Ephesus (**Acts 16:19-24; 19:23-31**). These dangerous situations each occurred in a city.
- Paul's list of dangers climaxes in false brothers and sisters, and his point is abundantly clear. Since he had bravely faced all sorts of dangers for Christ, he certainly would have enough courage to face those false teachers who were discrediting his authority and his name in Corinth.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:27.**

- Paul had begun his résumé by recounting the persecution and danger he had faced as a preacher of the gospel (11:22-26). Here Paul recounted the physical hardships of everyday life he encountered.
- First, we must consider that Paul had supported himself by working at a manual trade. Life as an itinerant laborer in the first century was difficult. As an outsider, Paul would have been given the most strenuous and difficult work (**1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8**). At Corinth, he had labored and toiled as a tentmaker (**Acts 18:1-3**). It was only in his spare time that he preached and taught. Because Paul wasn't able to dedicate himself completely to the ministry, he had willingly gone without sleep. Because of the low wages of itinerant laborers and the hardships of first-century travel, Paul wouldn't have been a stranger to hunger, thirst, and cold. But Paul had endured all these hardships

willingly as he lived the life of a first-century missionary to preach the gospel.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:28.**

- Not only had Paul faced beatings, dangers, and hardships, every day he prayerfully considered the spiritual condition of the churches. There were so many pitfalls and traps into which a young congregation could fall. Persecution could force a church to compromise its theology; quarreling and inner strife could distract the church from its purpose; false teachers could deceive a church. Paul was concerned that the churches would fail to persevere in the faith (**1 Thessalonians 3:5**).
- Paul's prayers reveal his concern (**Ephesians 1:16-18; 3:14-19; Colossians 1:3-14**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:29.**

- If Paul heard of any individual who was weak in the faith, he sympathized with that person. He encouraged stronger believers to help weaker ones (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:30.**

- Although the Corinthians had forced Paul to defend his integrity and his apostolic authority, this letter focuses on Paul's weakness. Paul openly paraded his sufferings, trials, and weaknesses before his opponents. He didn't boast in his accomplishments, as they did. If they were accusing him of being incompetent, Paul freely admitted that in and of

himself, he was not competent to preach the gospel; his competence came from Christ (3:4-6).

- Paul knew his authority didn't rest in his abilities but in his appointment. Christ had called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles (**Romans 1:1, 5; 11:13**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:31.**

- Paul had called on God as a witness to his truthfulness three other times in this letter: when he asserted his integrity in his recent travel plans (1:18), when he denied taking any money from the Corinthians (11:10), and when he asserted his genuine love for them (11:11). Paul didn't hesitate to call on God as a witness when he believed something he was saying would be doubted (**Galatians 1:20**). Here Paul may have thought that the Corinthians would doubt either the following story about his escape from Damascus (11:32-33) or the recounting of his vision of the third heaven (12:1-5).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:32.**

- King Aretas IV, the king of the Nabateans from 9 B.C. to A.D. 40, appointed a governor to oversee the Nabatean population in Damascus. The Jews in Damascus had been able to enlist this governor to help them apprehend Paul (**Acts 9:22-25**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:33.**

- Although Christ had predicted that Paul would suffer much for Him (Acts 9:15-16), this was probably the first time Paul had realized to what extent he would have to suffer. Hunted as a common criminal, he

couldn't stand up to his accusers and defend himself with integrity. Instead, he must flee. For Paul, escaping would have been considered a coward's way. This was probably one of the weakest moments he had experienced in his life, and admitting this to his opponents demonstrated the humility of this man.

## **LESSON 12**

### **2 Corinthians 12**

#### **PAUL'S VISION AND HIS THORN—12:1-10**

God had granted Paul a vision of the highest heaven. Paul had heard words that couldn't be repeated and had seen sights that couldn't be recounted. But because of this experience, God had given him a "thorn" in the flesh to humble him and continually reminded him of his utter dependence on God.

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 12:1.**

- It is clear from the number of times Paul mentions boasting in this section (11:30; 12:1, 5-6, 9-11), that he thought bragging about revelations was foolish. A revelation by definition was purely God's work. The Lord freely chooses to reveal mysteries and truths to those He wants to, not to those worthy of it. Paul's vision on the Damascus road proved that point. He was opposing Christ with all his strength, plotting the destruction of Christ's followers. Despite his intentions, Christ appeared to him (Acts 9:1-19). There wasn't any redeemable quality in Paul. There was no room for bragging. Jesus chose Paul.
- Yet apparently, Paul's critics were boasting in revelations. In effect, they were saying they had been judged worthy of these revelations. Only a fool boasts in something that is the work of God.

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 12:2.**

- In this sentence, Paul switched to the third person, speaking of the event as if another person had told him

about it. It is obvious; however, that Paul is, in fact, the person in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven. In 12:7, Paul would explain that God had given him a “thorn in the flesh” in order to keep him from becoming arrogant about this revelation.

- So why did Paul recount the revelation as if he were an observer and not a participant in these revelations? It appears this was Paul’s technique used to distance himself from the boasting he sensed he must do. Although he felt compelled to tell the Corinthians about this revelation in order to prove his apostolic authority, Paul spoke in the third person to avoid bragging directly about this revelation.
- Although Paul didn’t give many details about this ecstatic experience, he did write that he was “***caught up to the third heaven.***” In the Old and New Testament, the Scriptures use the word “heaven” to refer to three separate places. The first heaven is the earth’s atmosphere (**Acts 1:9-10**); the second heaven is the universe, which contains all the stars (**Genesis 1:14**). The third heaven is where God Himself lives (**1 Peter 3:22**). This is the “***heaven of heavens***” (**Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 68:33**). Paul saw his revelation as an extraordinary and unique revelation (12:7). Nothing less than going to the heaven above all heavens would silence those who boasted in their own revelations.
- It was fourteen years before that Paul experienced this revelation.
- Fourteen years before the writing of 2 Corinthians would be approximately A.D. 40, close to the beginning of Paul’s ministry. Paul may have experienced this revelation when he was stoned outside of Lystra and assumed dead (**Acts 14:19-20**).

- ***“Whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows.”*** Paul discouraged any extensive debate over the vision he had experienced by admitting his own ignorance about details and reminding the Corinthians of God’s omniscience. God is the only one who knows the mysteries surrounding Paul’s vision. The fact that Paul admitted the possibility that he could have been in the body was perhaps a rebuttal of the Greek notion that only one’s soul could ascend to God. Paul later explains at length the Christian concept of a bodily resurrection (**1 Corinthians 15:1-58**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 12:3-4.**

- This verse repeats the thought of 12:2. Notice in verse 2 Paul uses the term ***“third heaven”*** and here he uses the word ***“paradise.”*** Paul was merely repeating that he had actually been transported to heaven, though he didn’t know how.
- Jesus also had used the word ***“paradise”*** as a synonym for heaven. He had promised the thief on a cross next to His that He would meet the thief in paradise on that very day (**Luke 23:43**).
- ***“And heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”*** Given the extraordinary nature of the revelation (12:4), this is a surprisingly brief description of it. All Paul revealed was that he had been transported to heaven and had heard some things that he was not permitted to speak.
- What Paul saw and heard in heaven was meant for his own edification. Paul mentioned it here only to invalidate the claims of his opponents in Corinth.
- It’s interesting to note that accounts of revelations and visions typically focus on what a person has seen; however, Paul highlighted what he had heard.

## Read 2 Corinthians 12:5-6.

- Paul sensed he was on shaky ground when he started referring to a revelation that he couldn't describe. He didn't want anyone to mistakenly think he was boasting about himself in this revelation. Therefore, he once again issued a disclaimer that he wasn't boasting in himself.
- In this passage, Paul turned attention away from his vision and to his weaknesses. Paul, no doubt, was alluding to his "*thorn in the flesh*," which he would discuss in 12:7-10. The thorn in the flesh was another occasion for God's direct intervention in Paul's life. In 11:30-33, Paul had mentioned another experience in which he considered himself weak.

## Read 2 Corinthians 12:7.

- Paul's "*thorn in the flesh*" is not known, because he never reveals it. Because the Greek word for "flesh" can refer either to one's physical body or one's carnal self, there have been numerous conjectures concerning what the "*thorn in the flesh*" was.
- Yet this passage in 2 Corinthians does not focus on the exact problem Paul faced; he purposely didn't explain the nature of the problem in detail. The important point was why the thorn was given to him. Jesus had given Paul surpassingly great revelations in order to invigorate him for his mission to the Gentiles. But to keep Paul from becoming conceited about his unique vision, God had allowed Satan to torment him with some hardship or temptation. This thorn continually reminded Paul of his dependence on God and steered him away from pride, arrogance, and self-sufficiency. In this way, God would use Satan's evil designs for

good, just as he had with Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 50:19-20).

- The Bible describes God using Satan to test believers in several different places. According to the book of Job, Satan harassed Job with all kinds of catastrophes, including illness. But God limited Satan. He placed restrictions on what Satan could do (Job 1–2). In **1 Thessalonians 2:17-18**, Paul described how Satan hindered him from returning to Thessalonica (**Acts 17:1-10; Romans 17:17**). We must always remember that Satan has no power over Jesus (**John 14:30-31**) and that even the demons must obey Christ's will (**Mark 1:21-28; 5:1-13**). Moreover, Jesus gave this authority over the demons to the disciples (**Mark 6:7**).
- Paul had to explain the reason for his thorn because the Corinthians valued success instead of failure, power instead of weakness. Those who are so often dazzled by success need to learn the same lesson. Christ quite often works through weakness (**1 Corinthians 1:26-29**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 12:8.**

- Appropriately, Paul responded to these demonic-inspired attacks with prayer (**Luke 22:40; Ephesians 6:12, 18**). Paul prayed for the thorn's removal so he could be free to preach the Good News and build up others in the faith. Paul was persistent in his prayers, twice earnestly asking Christ to remove the problem. Even though Paul didn't receive a response, he determined to ask a third time. Three is not a magic number for how many times to pray. Paul didn't say why he only prayed three times. Jesus prayed three times in the garden of Gethsemane. Paul may have

followed Jesus' example in this situation (**Matthew 26:36-45**).

- In His wisdom, however, the Lord does not always remove problems, as He didn't do in this situation (12:9). Sometimes He denies requests so that His people will depend on his abundant grace.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 12:9.**

- Jesus' answer to Paul's prayer is the theme of 2 Corinthians: Christ's grace is sufficient for Paul's ministry, despite his own inadequacies and failures (1:3-4; 3:4-6; 4:1, 5, 7-12, 16-17; 6:3-10; 7:5-6; 10:17; 11:23-30; 13:9; see also 1 Corinthians 15:9-10). Christ's grace is sufficient to bear temptations, trials, and difficulties.
- Although Paul's request wasn't granted, Jesus assured him that His strength would be made perfect in Paul's weakness. The Greek word for "weakness" means the frailty of human existence.
- Thus Christ's strength is brought to completion when it shows itself through human weakness. Personal success and self-sufficiency obscures God's work. When there is no adversity, Jesus' power can be overlooked or taken for granted.
- ***"Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*** Paul restated Jesus' answer to him as a principle for his own life. Instead of continuing to ask God to take away his "thorn," Paul wholeheartedly accepted Jesus' answer to his prayer.
- Even if Jesus' way involved suffering, humiliation, and weaknesses, Paul would submit. In fact, he would gladly boast in his weaknesses, for it was through his weaknesses that Christ could powerfully work through

him. Christ's power could be fully displayed, not in Paul's strength, not in Paul's wisdom, and not in arrogant boasts, but in weakness. Paul didn't want to wander away from the protection and support that was in Christ by relying on his own strength. He wanted Christ's power to overshadow everything he did; only then would his work be truly effective.

- Jesus had taught His disciples this principle years before: ***“I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing”*** (John 15:5). It is only when believers remain in Christ and rely on Christ that they become truly effective.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 12:10.**

- Although Christ did not remove Paul's affliction, he promised to demonstrate His power in Paul's weaknesses. Knowing this, Paul welcomed times when he appeared weak or even powerless. He saw insults and hardships in a different light. They gave him opportunities to draw closer to Jesus.

## **PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THE CORINTHIANS 12:11-21**

Toward the end of 2 Corinthians, Paul begins to sound like a father who is profoundly disappointed in his children. Paul was disappointed that the Corinthians hadn't defended him when others had maligned his reputation (12:11-12). He was disappointed they were questioning his motives (12:16-18). He was disappointed they hadn't shown him the same kind of love he had showered on them (12:15). Paul was planning to visit Corinth, but he was clearly apprehensive about that visit.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 12:11.**

- The Corinthians should have defended their founder when malicious rumors about him had begun to circulate in their congregation. After all, Paul was their spiritual father (**1 Corinthians 4:15; 9:1; 11:2-4**).
- In an earlier letter, Paul had called himself “the least of the apostles” because he had at one time persecuted the church (**1 Corinthians 15:9-10**). Apparently, Paul’s critics in Corinth had seized upon this admission and had spoken against his apostolic authority. Thus Paul sarcastically calls them “super-apostles.” Actually, these people were false prophets (11:13-14). They claimed to be servants of Christ, but they refused to face suffering, persecution, and hardship for Christ’s sake. They were more concerned about money and their reputation than about Christ (2:17; 3:1).

### **THE MIRACLES OF PAUL**

Paul, as a spokesman for God and an evangelist to the Gentiles, performed miracles wherever he went. God gave Paul the power to heal, to exorcise, and to perform other wonders in order to verify the truth of his message (**Romans 15:17-19; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5**). In 12:12, Paul reminded the Corinthians of all the miracles he had done among them. That and their transformed lives should have been proof enough that God was speaking through him. Other scriptures to consider: **Acts 13:6-12; 14:1-3; 14:8-10; 15:12; 16:16-18; 19:11-12; 20:9-12; 28:1-19**.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 12:12.**

- When Paul was in Corinth, he had acted according to his calling as an apostle of Christ. He had been careful

to be completely honest in all his dealings so that no one could criticize his name (1:12). He had faithfully preached the gospel (5:11, 19-21; **1 Corinthians 1:23; 9:16-18**), and his preaching in Corinth had been accompanied by signs and wonders and mighty works of God. Jesus' ministry, like Paul's, was authenticated by various miracles (**Acts 2:22**).

- In fact, Paul had performed miracles in almost every city he had visited, from Lystra (**Acts 14:8-10**) to Ephesus (**Acts 19:11-12**). Through these signs, the Spirit of God had clearly demonstrated to the Corinthians Paul's apostolic authority and the truthfulness of the gospel message he preached (**Romans 15:17-19; 1 Corinthians 2:4**).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 12:13.**

- Paul's policy of preaching free of charge served him well when problems arose in the Corinthian congregation. It was the one behavior that Paul's opponents could never imitate, for the whole purpose of their ministry was to take people's money. By consistently pointing out this difference between himself and his critics, Paul hoped the Corinthians would finally wake up to the scam (2:17; 11:7-12). Paul's rhetorical question in this verse is sarcastic. The Corinthian church was better off than other churches, for Paul hadn't asked for their financial support.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 12:14-15.**

- Paul had founded the church in Corinth on his first visit there (**Acts 18:1**). He had later made a short and painful visit. That second visit was when he had warned those who were persistent in sinning to repent

of their sin (2:1; 13:2). After this visit, he had abandoned plans for another visit and had instead written a stern letter warning the Corinthian congregation that it was the church's responsibility to discipline the wrongdoer (7:8-13). Now he was planning to visit them. This would be his third visit (13:1).

- Paul explained that, as on his previous visits, he didn't want to be paid or fed. The Corinthian church was too divided; accusations might result from him accepting any money. Paul didn't want their possessions, rather, he wanted to love them and be a friend even if they did not return his love.
- ***“For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but parents for their children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls.”***
- As a parent naturally loves his or her child, Paul loved the Corinthians. As their spiritual father, he wanted nothing materially from them, but like a father, would gladly spend on them. Fathers in the first century were expected to support their children, saving money and possessions as an inheritance for their sons and a dowry for their daughters. The fact that he refused financial support wasn't a sign of his rejection of the Corinthians but a sign of his great affection for them (11:11). Paul was willing to go beyond storing money for them; he was willing to expend himself, to completely exhaust his finances, time, and energy, on them. Paul's love for them was more than a parental love; it was a self-sacrificial, Christ-like love.
- After expressing his love for the Corinthians, Paul made this statement, ***“Though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.”***

## **Read 2 Corinthians 12:16-17.**

- Ever since the false teachers had arrived in Corinth, they had tried to find ways to extort money from the church (2:17; 11:7-12). The false teachers attempted to discredit Paul, and they had done so by casting doubt on the collection for the destitute Jerusalem Christians (8:1–9:15). “Was this Paul’s devious way of collecting money for himself?” “Would he dip his hand into the pot once it was all collected?” According to them, the Jerusalem collection was Paul’s way of taking advantage of the churches.
- From the beginning, however, Paul had guarded against such accusations. The Corinthians had proposed the collection in the first place (8:10). At the time, Paul had told them to set aside money each week when he was gone. Also, Paul would have nothing to do with collecting the money. Moreover, he wouldn’t even deliver the collection to Jerusalem (**1 Corinthians 16:1-3**). Paul would have no contact with the money.
- Finally, Paul asked the Corinthians a question: did he trick them out of their money?

## **Read 2 Corinthians 12:18.**

- Titus had earned the respect of the Corinthians (7:13-16). Paul had given Titus the difficult task of delivering the severe letter to the Corinthians (7:7-9). Titus had accepted the challenge and had done a masterful job of exhorting the Corinthians and smoothing over their relationship with Paul (7:7).
- Paul reminded the Corinthians that Titus was functioning as his representative. If they had found nothing wrong with Titus’s conduct, how could they

find anything wrong with him, the very person Titus was representing?

- This appeal would have been even more persuasive because Titus himself was delivering the epistle known as 2 Corinthians.

## **Read 2 Corinthians 12:19.**

- Paul was thinking that the Corinthians might get the impression he was trying to defend his own reputation. Here Paul corrected this impression, if it existed.
- It wasn't before the Corinthians that Paul was speaking, it was before God himself. By clearly stating he was speaking before God at various points in this letter (1:12-14, 23; 2:10; 3:4; 4:2; 5:10-11; 10:18; 11:11, 31), Paul was trying to impress on the Corinthians the importance of their actions. This wasn't merely a debate between two teachers—this was a dispute that was being held in the throne room of God. The Lord Himself would judge who was His trustworthy representative (5:20; 6:3-10).
- ***“But we do all things, beloved, for your edification.”*** Paul was confident he would pass God's judgment because God knew all that he had done was for the Corinthians' benefit. Paul's chief concern was for the Corinthians to become firmly grounded in the faith. All of his efforts were dedicated to building up the Corinthians in the faith and were directed to this purpose, whether it was delaying a visit (1:23-24) or writing a stern letter of warning (7:8-9), whether it was his willingness to endure suffering (1:6) or his refusal to take money (11:7; 12:14-15). Paul knew that God Himself could see his motives, that everything he did was out of love for the Corinthians (11:11) and concern for their spiritual welfare (11:2-3).

## Read 2 Corinthians 12:20.

- On his last visit to Corinth, Paul had warned those who were persisting in sin to repent of their ways (13:2). He had even postponed his plans to visit Corinth in order to give them time to put their church in order (1:23–2:4). According to Titus’s report, the Corinthians had made some progress in this. They had taken appropriate action against the anonymous offender (2:5-11; 7:11). Their discipline was so severe that Paul had become concerned the offender might leave the Christian faith altogether (2:7-11).
- *“I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfishness, backstabbing, gossip, conceit, and disorderly behavior.”* Even with all this progress, Paul was still concerned that the church might not be ready for his visit.
- These evil attitudes of quarreling and jealousy were resulting in outbursts of anger in the church. Evidently, tempers were short because of the division and jealousy in the Corinthian church. Instead of growing into a supportive community of faith (**1 Corinthians 12:12-13**), the Corinthians were dividing into factions and fighting each other. In the process, they were tearing down the church (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**).
- Instead of building each other up in the Christian faith (**1 Corinthians 12:7**), the Corinthians were simply growing conceited and inflated with self-importance (**1 Corinthians 4:6; 8:1**). Their arrogance had become an obstacle to God and His work.
- Finally, Paul warned the Corinthians of disorderly behavior, just as he had done in 1 Corinthians (6:1-8; 11:20-22, 33-34; 14:32-33, 40). Paul was speaking about any behavior that disrupted worship services or contributed to the disunity of the church.

## Read 2 Corinthians 12:21.

- Paul had already told the Corinthians he was concerned that he might be humiliated when he came to Corinth. Some Macedonian Christians were accompanying him. If Paul found the church in disorder and the Corinthians refusing to participate in the Jerusalem collection, then Paul would be humiliated in the presence of the devout Christians from Macedonia (9:3-5).
- Paul hinted that finding the Corinthian congregation in disorder would mean more than his own humiliation. He would mourn over those who stubbornly refused to repent of their sins.
- The sins Paul listed here are sexual sins (as compared to sins relating to pride in 12:20). The Greek for “impurity” means “unclean.” The word suggests that those who participate in sexual perversions are “unclean” before God. The Greek for “sexual immorality” is *porneia* (the word is the root for the English word “pornographic”). *Porneia* refers to illicit sexual intercourse and is commonly translated “fornication.” Finally, the Greek for “licentiousness” means “excess” or “absence of restraint.” The word connotes shameful conduct, the type of sexual deviance that occurred at religious orgies in Corinth.
- Paul had already warned them to resist the sexual temptations that were commonplace in Corinth (**1 Corinthians 6:18-20**). The church was to discipline those church members who persisted in sexual immorality (**1 Corinthians 5:9-12**).
- Paul was afraid his directions had not been heeded. The fact that he would mourn over those who hadn’t repented of their sexual sins implied that Paul was going to carry out the discipline he had told the Corinthians to impose. On his visit, he would have to remove these people from fellowship, even though it would cause him great sorrow.

## **LESSON 13**

### **2 Corinthians 13**

#### **PAUL'S FINAL ADVICE—13:1-14**

True Christian love sometimes demands confrontation. Throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul had expressed his great love for the Corinthians (11:11; 12:15). He had spent most of the letter taking the time to address their concerns and their accusations (1:12-14, 17, 23; 4:1-2; 5:11-13; 6:11-12; 12:16-18). But at the end of this letter, in this last chapter, Paul didn't hesitate to warn the Corinthians sternly (13:2).

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:1-2.**

- Paul had first visited Corinth on his second missionary journey. In that city known for its vigorous commerce and also for its gross immorality, Paul had gathered together a small group of believers. He spent a year and a half with them, instructing them in the Christian faith (**Acts 18:1-17**). During his second visit, a painful incident had occurred (2:1, 5). Therefore, Paul's next visit was the third time he would have been in Corinth.
- Paul quoted **Deuteronomy 19:15** as a stern legal summons to the Corinthians.
- The exact reason why Paul quoted **Deuteronomy 19:15** has been the subject of some debate among commentators. Paul may have been quoting **Deuteronomy 19:15** to indicate two ideas—that he had already given them three warnings and that they could bring disputes before him with three witnesses. Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 18:15-17** supports both ideas. Jesus had instructed his disciples to confront a fellow Christian with three warnings—one in private, one with two other witnesses, and one in front of the church (**Matthew 18:15-17**). There were to be not only three

different witnesses before anyone could pass judgment on a believer but also three separate occasions when the believer was to be warned of his or her sin.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:3.**

- Some of the Corinthians had been asking for proof that Paul was truly speaking on behalf of Christ, that he was truly an apostle.
- Paul did not censure their critical attitude. They certainly were to judge their teachers to ascertain whether they preached that Jesus is Lord (**1 Corinthians 12:2-3**). But the Corinthians were judging Paul by the wrong standards. Instead of judging whether his message pointed to Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Corinthians were criticizing Paul for his lack of eloquence, his weaknesses, and his timidity (10:1; 11:5; 12:7-10).
- In this verse, Paul directly challenged the Corinthians. If they were looking for proof and mighty power, then they would most assuredly experience Christ's power on his next visit. Jesus' power among them, however, would not be the type of power the Corinthians were expecting. He wouldn't present spectacular wonders through Paul, and he wouldn't be coming to prove himself to the Corinthians but rather to judge the false teachers among them.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:4.**

- Paul's consistent message to the Corinthians was that Christ died on the cross (**1 Corinthians 1:23**), a message of Christ's weakness.
- Paul reminded the Corinthians that God's strength demonstrated itself through weakness, not through

power (12:9). Christ's own life was testimony of this fact. Jesus had refused Satan's tempting offers to wield power over people's lives. He rejected the opportunity to impress people and create a large following by jumping from the top of the temple and miraculously surviving (**Matthew 4:5-7**). He even refused Satan's offer to rule over the entire world (**Matthew 4:8-10**). Instead, Jesus took the more difficult road that God had laid out for him, the road of suffering, humiliation, and a criminal's death on the cross. Instead of wielding power over the world (the authority that was his right as the Son of God), Jesus had come to serve and even lay down his life for others (**Matthew 20:28**). Through Christ's weakness, God worked in a powerful way. Through Christ's death on the cross, God provided salvation for all those who believe (**John 3:16-18**).

- Just as God had demonstrated his power through Christ's weakness, he was doing the same in Paul's life.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:5.**

- The Corinthians had insisted on testing Paul, the one who had introduced them to the gospel of salvation in the first place. This letter responds to the Corinthians and answers some of their questions (1:12-24; 3:4-6; 11:22-23; 12:16-18). Now that Paul had withstood their investigation, he asked the Corinthians to examine themselves, to test whether they were acting in accordance with the Christian faith.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:6.**

- If the Corinthians did pass their own self-examination, then, by implication, Paul would have, also, passed the

test. The fact that their lives had been changed by the gospel Paul had preached was his letter of recommendation (3:1-3). Although it was completely absurd for the Corinthian church to question their own founder, they were doing just that! Here Paul tactfully reminded the Corinthians that their Christian faith was a result of his ministry, the same ministry that they were now questioning.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:7-8.**

- Paul had never stopped praying for the Corinthians. He prayed God might give them the wisdom and the power to do what was right.
- Paul didn't want to be misunderstood. He wasn't praying for their success, so that, in turn, he would appear successful. He wasn't acting in the same way as those false teachers who preached for profit—those preachers who looked for good recommendations from successful churches (2:17-3:1). His prayer was for the Corinthians' success, even if it meant that people might consider him to be a failure. Just as Christ was willing to suffer insults and die on a cross in order to serve all of humanity, Paul was willing to become a failure in order to serve the Corinthians and the truth of the gospel (13:4).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:9.**

- Just as parents will make great sacrifices for their children's welfare, so Paul didn't hesitate to make sacrifices for the Corinthians. Paul wanted the Corinthians to grow in the faith and to become strong Christians. If he had to exhaust himself, deplete his

own resources, and appear weak, he would do so for their sakes (1:6; 12:14-15).

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:10.**

- Paul had written 2 Corinthians and was sending it with Titus (8:16, 23) so that when he came, he would find the Corinthian church in order. This letter, although at times a bit severe (11:3-5, 19-21), was an expression of Paul's great love for the Corinthians (11:11; 12:15). Just as a concerned parent would warn an out-of-control child before the child gets hurt or severely punished, so Paul was warning the Corinthians before it was too late.
- Paul hoped and prayed for the best. Throughout the letter, he expressed his confidence in the Corinthians. He knew they could handle all the difficult and troublesome situations in their congregation. By delaying his visit to Corinth and sending Titus instead (2:1; 7:6-8; 8:16-17), Paul was giving the Corinthians time to respond to his warnings appropriately. Paul was hoping this letter would prepare the Corinthians for his visit.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:11.**

- “*Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete*” repeats Paul's command in 13:9 (the NIV translates the Greek word in this verse and in 13:9 with the English word “perfection”).
- Paul had already warned the Corinthians and told them what to do, which basically was to listen to him. His appeal in 2 Corinthians was to reject the false gospel of his opponents (11:2-5) and to stay faithful to the gospel he had preached to them (6:1-2; 13:5).

- ***“Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”*** Paul knew the disruption the false teachers had caused in the Corinthian church would create disunity. In fact, the Corinthian church from the start hadn’t been unified. It had been plagued with quarrels and disruptions (**1 Corinthians 1:11-13**). In 1 Corinthians, Paul had carefully explained to the Corinthians that each member of the church was part of the body of Christ. In the same way that the parts of a person’s body work together, the Corinthians should work together as members of Christ’s body. With his brief commands to agree and to live in peace, this verse sums up Paul’s exhortations in his earlier letter for the Corinthians to unite as one congregation under Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:27**). They were to put their disputes aside and join together under Christ’s leadership.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:12-13.**

- Paul encouraged the Corinthians to greet each other with a kiss. He had done the same in his earlier letter to them (**1 Corinthians 16:20**). In Paul’s day, a kiss on a person’s cheek was a common greeting, a gesture of friendship. Such a kiss is similar to a hearty handshake or a hug in present-day society. Paul was evidently encouraging the Corinthians to greet one another warmly as the first sign of their unity.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 13:14.**

- Paul’s final blessing on the Corinthians invokes all three members of the Trinity; the Father (God), the Son (Lord Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. Although the term “Trinity” is not used in the Bible, verses such as

this one show that early Christians believed there were three persons in the Godhead.

- With this final Trinitarian benediction, Paul was giving the Corinthians a model from the Godhead of how to be unified in love. Through the Spirit's empowering, they, too, could begin to imitate in their congregation the grace, love, and fellowship that the Godhead already enjoyed.





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