

2 Corinthians

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? A follow-up to the issues Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians—plus an answer to those who questioned Paul's authority.

WHO WROTE IT? The apostle Paul.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? Within a year of the writing of 1 Corinthians.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia.

THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapters 1-3: Why Paul needs to defend himself
- Chapters 4-5: Death, suffering, and ministry
- Chapters 6-7: Living as Christians
- Chapters 8-9: The joy of giving
- Chapters 10-13: Paul's defense of his apostolic authority

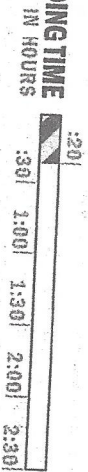
KEY CONCEPTS

- Apostle
- Confident
- Boast
- Weakness, suffering
- Giving

SCORECARD

- **Paul:** The author, founder of the church in Corinth
- **Titus:** Paul's representative, sent to the Corinthian church

READING TIME



WORTH MEMORIZING

• **1:3-4** All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

• **3:17-18** For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

• **4:7** We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

• **5:17** Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person.

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

• **TOUGH GOING.** Paul's toughness and endurance rival anything we can find in sports or the military. Just look at his never-give-up attitude (4:7-12), the hardships he went through (11:23-28), and his admissions of weakness (11:29-33; 12:7-11). He did all this out of sacrificial love for other Christians (4:15)—a world-class role model for all of us.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF 2 Corinthians?

INTRODUCTION TO 2 CORINTHIANS

BACKGROUND

Paul is the acknowledged writer of 1 and 2 Corinthians, who no doubt wrote one or two other letters to the church in Corinth that have not survived. Paul writes this letter in anticipation of his third visit to the church community in Corinth (12:14; 13:1). He writes that his second visit had not gone well (2:1), but his greeting and encouragements of chapter 1 indicate that he is somewhat reconciled with the community. Because of the influence of false teachers over the believers in Corinth, Paul feels the need to defend his ministry against those who question his authority as an apostle. (See also the introduction to 1 Corinthians.)

MESSAGE

At the beginning of this very personal letter, Paul describes the comfort a believer can access in times of trouble. He uses strong images to describe the life of a Christian: we are a "savour of Christ"

OUTLINE

I. Paul's Apostolic Ministry

- A. Comfort one another
- B. Paul explains and instructs
- C. Character of Paul's ministry

II. Offering for the Macedonian Church

- A. Paul versus false teachers
- B. Paul's visions and revelations
- C. Paul's desires for the people
- D. Paul plans to visit

A tough man can endure tough times.

(2:15-16): we are an "epistle of Christ ... written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" (3:3). In our "earthen vessels" we have the treasure of God's light (4:7). In Christ we are each a "new creature" (5:17). We are "ambassadors for Christ" (5:20). Despite his hardships, Paul writes of his joy. He commends the church in Corinth for their generosity to others and encourages them to continue their financial support of those in need. Paul reminds his readers that his authority ultimately comes from God, responding directly to undermining opposition he has received. He urges the Corinthian believers to stay true to the gospel and the Savior in whom they initially believed and to avoid those opposed to Christ. The format of Paul's final blessing is uniquely Trinitarian.

TIME

Second Corinthians was written in late A.D. 56, while Paul was in Macedonia (2:13; 7:5).

- 1:1-11 10:1-11:33
- 1:12-2:17 12:1-10
- 3:1-7:16 12:11-21
- 8:1-9:15 13:1-14



If you find yourself slandered in today's world, there are many ways to set the record straight, for we have access to modern communication and technology. But in the first century, the apostle Paul didn't have modern media. It was difficult for him to defend himself. Second Corinthians was essentially a document to prepare the church in Corinth for an imminent visit in which Paul intended to set the record straight about his integrity and authority.

Paul had founded the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey. But after his departure, false apostles had arrived. Their hurtful slander infected the believers. These false apostles, Paul declared in 2 Corinthians, were agents of Satan masquerading as ministers of righteousness. Paul described his own sufferings for Christ and appealed to the Corinthians to remember that "You are our epistle," he said, "written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (2 Corinthians 3:2).

It's not necessary to answer all our critics or to defend ourselves for the sake of pride or legacy. But when an attack harms the cause of Christ, that's different. How wonderful to be able to say, as Paul did 2 Corinthians 5:20-21: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

KEY THOUGHT:

Those who represent Christ must have a clear message and godly motives and methods, so that their integrity will be obvious even amid slander.

KEY VERSES:

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."
2 Corinthians 5:20-21

KEY ACTION:

Slander in the work of Christ is temporary; service for the cause of Christ is eternal.

KEY PRAYER:

Lord, I am righteous only because of Your righteousness.

BASIC SURVEY

2 CORINTHIANS

AUTHOR: The apostle Paul, with Timothy's assistance (1:1).

DATE: Approximately AD 55-57, shortly after the writing of 1 Corinthians.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Paul defends his ministry to the troubled Corinthian church.

DETAILS, PLEASE

Corinthian believers had apparently addressed some of the problems Paul's first letter mentioned—though there were still troublemakers who questioned his authority. He was forced to “speak foolishly” (11:21 KJV), boasting of hardships he'd faced serving Jesus: “I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again” (11:23 NLT). Paul even suffered a “thorn in the flesh” (12:7 KJV), which God refused to take away, telling him instead, “My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (12:9 KJV). His parting warning: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves” (13:5 NKJV).

QUOTABLE

> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (5:21 NIV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Paul never identifies his “thorn in the flesh,” though some speculate it may have been bad eyesight, temptations, even physical unattractiveness.

SO WHAT?

Christians should respect authority—whether in the church, the home, or society at large.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2-3.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 224. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 224. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 221. →

CLOSER LOOK

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Believers must one day give an account of their lives—both their words and their deeds. Paul wrote, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10 NIV). Paul adds: “We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. . . . Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God” (Romans 14:10, 12 NLT).

We will not only be required to give an account of how we lived our lives, but we will then be rewarded in proportion to the good we have done, or suffer loss for the wrong we have done, or the good we failed to do. This judgment is not to determine whether we go to heaven or to hell. Believers' names are already written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

This judgment will determine *how much* we're rewarded. It will be a very loving and fair judgment—but it will be thorough. As Paul wrote: “If anyone's work which he has built . . . endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:14-15 NKJV).

Even if we lived futile lives, doing little for Christ, our salvation remains secure. But what a terrible, needless loss to see the selfish ambition and self-seeking works of years burned away. Nevertheless, we are forgiven and will remain in Christ's love.

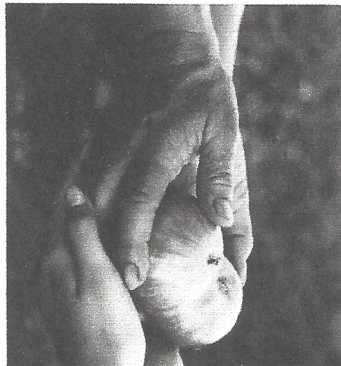
READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5-6.

- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 222. →

CLOSER LOOK

CHRISTIANS GIVING GENEROUSLY

In the Old Testament, God promised, “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do. . . I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in!” (Malachi 3:10 NLT). That is a powerful promise, and many Christians have faithfully given a tenth of their earnings and have been blessed mightily in return—not entirely with financial benefits, but often in other ways. They count themselves abundantly blessed already if God keeps accidents, financial disasters, and sickness away.



We should be willing to give generously to others, and we should do so with a cheerful heart.

While Jesus had almost nothing to say about tithing, He constantly spoke about giving generously. For example, He said, “Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back” (Luke 6:38 NLT). Part of this return will be financial since God *has* promised to supply all our physical needs (Philippians 4:13), but remember that we’re often simply blessed spiritually because, as Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35 KJV).

However, God blesses us for giving. He *does* bless us. Paul wrote, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6–7 NIV).

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8–9.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 224.



HIDDEN TREASURE

CAST DOWN BUT VICTORIOUS

Life for Christians isn’t always easy, contrary to what you may have heard. There will be times when God allows very heavy circumstances to press you down. As Paul said, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure” (2 Corinthians 1:8 NIV). At times, God allows things in our lives that, if they continued, would be literally unbearable. Most of the time, however, our situation resembles this: “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair” (2 Corinthians 4:8 NKJV). Only Christ in us can give us the strength to make it (Philippians 4:19). Therefore “cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7 NIV).

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1 AND 4.

HIDDEN TREASURE

SPIRITUAL WAR



We should always be prepared to defend God’s truth and to fight the temptations of the devil. This painting titled *Saint Michael Vanquishing Satan* is by Raffaello Sanzio (1483–1520).

We are engaged in a war “against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12 KJV). The apostle Peter warns, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8 NIV), so we’re commanded, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7 KJV). To do this, we must take up spiritual weapons (Ephesians 6:17–18). Paul tells us that “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying. . . every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:4–5 NASB). While this refers primarily to demolishing arguments against God, it also applies to our spiritual battle against the enemy.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 10–11.

2 CORINTHIANS

- A. PAUL DISCUSSES HIS MOTIVES AND ACTIONS (1:1 — 2:13)
- B. PAUL RELATES HIS MINISTRY TO THE NEW COVENANT (2:14 — 7:16)
- C. PAUL APPEALS TO HIS READERS FOR SUPPORT (8:1 — 9:15)
- D. PAUL DEFENDS HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY (10:1 — 13:14)

THE BIG PICTURE

Paul wrote this letter mainly to defend the authority of his teachings about Christ. The church at Corinth was struggling, and one of its problems was the presence of members who openly challenged Paul's authority. These challengers slandered Paul's character and questioned the message he preached. They also introduced a number of dangerous false teachings. Since the believers in Corinth had come to faith through Paul's ministry, these false teachers and their message put the entire church at risk.

The false teachers claimed that following the Jewish laws was a requirement for salvation. To counteract this false teaching, Paul emphasized the truth that God changes us from the inside out. We cannot change ourselves merely by changing our external behavior. As we are reconciled to God, he transforms us into entirely new people; our old selves are changed in a fundamental sense.

Change is never easy, especially when it involves our lifestyles. Old habits die hard; positive habits often fall prey to neglect. Typically the habits that die hardest are our unhealthy thoughts and behavior patterns. "Out with the old, in with the new!" sounds simple, but even as we long for an end to our bad habits, we often cling to them.

Fortunately, God's power can make a significant change in our lives. Through Christ's death and resurrection, God made it possible for us to die to our old ways of life and be reborn to a new life. These are not superficial changes in behavior; they are spiritual changes of heart that bring about the outward changes in lifestyle that we long for. By being reconciled to God, we put to death our old lives, receive new lives in Christ and are transformed from the inside out.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

GOD'S POWER FOR OUR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

All of us have made resolutions about things in our life that we are going to change. The results are usually the same — we end up falling back into the same old bad habits we promised to abandon. The Corinthians tried to do the same thing, with the same results. What they failed to understand as they listened to the false teachers was that only God's power could change their lives. Our own efforts always fall short. Instead of merely making resolutions to change, we need to recognize our need for God's power and surrender our lives to God. Then the Holy Spirit within us will give us the power we need for our spiritual renewal.

LEARNING TO ACCEPT CRITICISM

One of Paul's purposes in writing this letter was to discipline those who needed to be corrected. Criticism usually hurts. Yet it also reveals what we need to change. Confrontation and criticism force us to face our problems, accept responsibility for them and ask God to redirect our course. If we hope to preserve spiritual gains, we must confront and solve problems, not ignore them; that means being open to criticism.

CONFLICT CAN INSPIRE GROWTH

Interpersonal conflicts are an inevitable part of being human. How conflicts affect us depends on how we handle them. If we view conflicts as opportunities for growth as Paul urged the Corinthians to do, we can turn our struggles into something productive. If we are willing to face our problems and try to solve them in loving ways, we will make spiritual progress as we recommend ourselves to hold each other accountable. But if we ignore the problems that divide us, they can eat away at us like a cancer, destroying the work of God, not only within us, but also in others around us. Conflicts are opportunities for growth if we will use them as such.

GOD'S STRENGTH IN OUR WEAKNESS

In this letter Paul told about a particular "thorn" in his flesh (see 2 Corinthians 12:7). We don't know what this problem was because Paul didn't describe it. Some have suggested that his problem was a physical ailment, perhaps a disease affecting his eyes. Whatever it was, this problem was debilitating and chronic, and at times it interfered with his work. It also kept Paul humble because it forced him to depend on God. Through this hardship, Paul learned to thank God for this weakness. Each of us will always have weaknesses that can hold us back. But our weaknesses also have a purpose — to bring us to God.

Essential Facts

PURPOSE:

To explain new life in Christ while defending Paul's authority as an apostle.

AUTHOR:

The apostle Paul.

AUDIENCE:

The church at Corinth, a city in Greece.

DATE WRITTEN:

About AD 55, from Macedonia.

SETTING:

Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers to correct their misunderstandings about him and his message and to help them with other problems.

KEY VERSE:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!" (5:17).

KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Paul with Timothy, Titus, the Corinthian believers and some false teachers.

KEY PLACES:

Corinth, Macedonia, Troas and Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians

Ever give a friend advice only to have him or her ignore what you said? When Paul wrote the letter that became 1 Corinthians, he was honest with the believers in Corinth about their problems, but less than a year later he was writing them again. First, he gives them the good news that he had heard from Titus about some tremendous improvements. But there were still problems. Unfortunately, a group of people still refused to listen to Paul's advice.

In order to make his case, Paul decided to tell his own story, including his many sufferings. If a mumbling minority doubted his right to speak for the faith, then the only answer was to explain who he was and how God had changed his life. It was the only way he could defend his position as an apostle.

The first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians discuss Paul's ministry. In 2:15-16, he explains the job of a believer: "For to God we are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To some we are an aroma of death leading to death, but to others, an aroma of life leading to life." That means that—*no matter what*—Christians should speak God's message honestly and sincerely, expecting nothing in return. Does that mean that being a believer guarantees us smooth sailing? Of course not. "We are pressured in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (4:8-10).

As "ambassadors for Christ" (5:20), we want to tell others how to be reconciled to God.

Learning to give to others—to show love to fellow Christians—is one way to draw the watching world to Christ, as chapters 8-9 convey.

Finally, in chapters 10-13, Paul retells his own story. For standing firm in the faith he was beaten, shipwrecked, and often went sleepless, hungry, and thirsty. Read

chapter 11 for more details. By sharing his story, Paul proved his credentials to those in the church who doubted his authority to teach and lead.

Paul advises Christians to "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test" (13:5). That's a challenge for each of us. Are we praying, reading God's Word, and serving Christ and others with joy? If the answer isn't a resounding yes, then it's time to make changes. Studying this book is a great start.

Author: Paul (Saul of Tarsus)

Date: Written around A.D. 55 from Macedonia

What in the world is going on?

- A.D. 44 B.C. Julius Caesar makes Corinth a Roman colony
- A.D. 26-30 Years of Jesus' ministry
- A.D. 46 Greek biographer Plutarch is born
- A.D. 47-49 Ostorius Scapula leads the Romans against tribes living in Wales (the Silures and Ordovices) for control of Wales
- A.D. 49 The Roman emperor, Claudius, forces the Jews out of Rome. Priscilla and Aquila leave Rome and wind up in Corinth where they meet Paul
- ca A.D. 50-52 Paul visits Corinth for the first time on his second missionary journey
- ca A.D. 50 The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a Greek navigational manuscript describing Roman ports and first-century trade, is written
- A.D. 54-68 Nero rules the Roman Empire
- A.D. 54 Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus
- A.D. 55 Junius Gallio is consul of Achaia in Greece
- ca A.D. 55-65 Mark writes his Gospel
- A.D. 55 Paul writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia
- A.D. 56 Famed Roman historian Tacitus is born
- A.D. 57-75 During the reign of Mingdi, the emperor of China (Han dynasty), Buddhism is introduced in China
- A.D. 57 Paul writes the letter to the Romans from Corinth on his third missionary journey
- ca A.D. 60-64 Paul is free from Roman prison and writes letters to Timothy and Titus
- ca A.D. 64-65 Paul the apostle is executed in Rome

2 Corinthians

BOOK INTRODUCTION

If you find yourself being lied about or slandered in today's world, there are any number of ways to set the record straight—group e-mails, social media, blog posts, or video conference calls. But in AD 55, the apostle Paul could not track down the leaders of the Corinthian church on their phones. This was an era when all communication was either face-to-face or by letter, and to get anywhere you had to rely on four-legged transportation, a perilous sailing vessel, or your own two sandaled feet. In the meantime, your enemies could have a field day portraying you in distorted, unflattering terms or attacking your character with outright lies.

In human terms, Paul was saddened and frustrated—bordering on indignant and angry—about what was happening at the church he had founded just four years before: He was being viciously slandered by a particularly arrogant group of adversaries, but what could he do? He could write letters to the congregation making his defense, he could plan face-to-face visits to tackle the issues head on, and he could also give himself to prayer—the original “wireless communication.”

His second letter to the Corinthians was essentially a document to prepare them for an imminent visit. Would it be a happy reunion of brothers and sisters in Christ, or a tense standoff? The answer was up to them. One thing was for sure: Paul could not let the situation continue as it was—not when his very authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ was being challenged.

Paul had first brought the gospel to Corinth on his second missionary journey, probably in AD 51. After facing bitter opposition from the Jews of the city, he dramatically shook out his garments in their presence, declared that he was done with them, and turned to the Gentiles instead (Acts 18:6). He stayed a year and a half in Corinth, teaching the gospel and establishing a church.

WHAT IT SAYS | *An Open-Hearted Response to Slander*

Paul sent his second letter to the Corinthians from Macedonia and then journeyed to Corinth himself some time after, staying in the city for three months (Acts 20:2, 3). There was obviously much to discuss.

What was at the heart of the discord? What had caused the Corinthian Christians to question Paul's credentials as an apostle and to suggest he was not to be trusted (13:3)? Paul reveals the heart of the problem in chapter 11; false apostles had infiltrated the

Corinthian church. Their counterfeit teachings and hurtful slander about Paul had infected the believers in that fellowship, and Paul feared that, “as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so [their] minds [might] be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (11:3).

The so-called “most eminent apostles” who had infiltrated the church were charlatans—slick, trained orators who preached for pay while Paul preached “free of charge” (11:7). The false apostles sneered at him as if to say, “You get what you pay for.” Paul, however, considered this to be a true test of his integrity by which he would eventually discredit his opponents (11:12).

When it came down to the battle for souls with eternal consequences, Paul was not shy about stating his case. These false apostles, he declared, were in fact agents of Satan himself, masquerading as “ministers of righteousness” (11:13–15). Then Paul turned his argument on its head. To demonstrate his apostolic credentials, he catalogued all the ways he had suffered in his service for Christ through the years—a résumé of suffering—as if to say, “See if these false apostles can produce a record like this . . .” Paul then revealed a very personal encounter with Christ to show that it was his suffering and weakness, not his eloquence or strength, that proved the mettle of his character (11:16–12:10).

By far, the greatest defense of the legitimacy of Paul's ministry among the Corinthians was the fruit. If he were a false apostle, inferior to these “super-apostles,” then would his message have any effect? No! But the lives of the Corinthians bore witness to Paul as an authenticated messenger of God. The Spirit of God worked through Paul to enact real transformation among the Corinthians—a seal of authenticity was stronger than any claim made by the false apostles (1:15–20).

Paul's vigorous defense of his ministry in chapters 10–13 was all in preparation for his upcoming visit. Nevertheless, his letter was not entirely confrontation and bad news. In the early part of the epistle, he rejoices at the good news Titus had brought to him in Macedonia from Corinth; apparently, the first letter he wrote them (7:8) had found its mark in their heart. They were sorrowful and had repented, vindicating themselves in Paul's sight: “Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything” (7:5–16). Titus returned to Corinth carrying this letter, which contained Paul's words of reconciliation and rejoicing (2:16–18) along with instructions on how to enjoy the peace and love of God: “Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace” (13:11).

WHAT IT MEANS | *The Cost of Discipleship*

The battered apostle laid himself bare in 2 Corinthians as in no other epistle—all for the sake of the gospel. Paul emphasizes four themes in this poignant letter:

- **Suffering:** Twice in 2 Corinthians, Paul outlines the price he paid for service to Christ and the gospel (6:3–13; 11:16–33). These two listings of Paul's hardships and trials call to mind Jesus' warnings to all believers about the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:25–33).
- **Giving:** In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul sets out the most detailed description of sacrificial and generous giving found anywhere in his epistles. It is not only an exhortation to give to those in need but a promise that God is faithful to enable His people to give.
- **Reconciliation:** Paul gives a concise summary of the dynamics of being made right with God: He reconciles us to Himself through Christ; we become a new creation; we implore others to be reconciled to Him (5:11–6:2).
- **Apostolic Self-Defense:** In defending his own ministry, Paul outlines what should characterize one who professes to represent Christ in leadership. Boldness in defending the gospel and boasting in the grace of Christ are what set apart truly spiritual leaders from carnal ones (12:7–10).

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU | Swallowed Up by Life

No doubt feeling the aches and pains of his many beatings, shipwrecks, at least one storming, and frequent deprivations, Paul reminded the Corinthians that the physical body is only a temporary abode. In other words, life on earth is like camping out for a few days. Death, when it finally arrives, simply means that the believer leaves behind a leaky, patchwork, travel-worn tent and steps into a wondrous permanent body, designed to last forever. The child of God, then, is not claimed by death but is "swallowed up by life" (5:4).

For all the anxieties, pressures, and disappointments we wrestle with, it is encouraging to remember that God's people are only on temporary assignment in the wilderness of this world, where their aim is to point fellow travelers to the Way and to be "well pleasing to Him" (5:9).

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE

CORINTHIANS

SINCE PAUL'S FIRST LETTER, THE Corinthian church had been swayed by false teachers who stirred the people against Paul. They claimed he was fickle, proud, unimpressive in appearance and speech, dishonest, and unqualified as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul sent Titus to Corinth to deal with these difficulties, and upon his return, rejoiced to hear of the Corinthians' change of heart. Paul wrote this letter to express his thanksgiving for the repentant majority and to appeal to the rebellious minority to accept his authority. Throughout the book he defends his conduct, character, and calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

To distinguish this epistle from First Corinthians, it was given the title *Pros Korinthios B*, the "Second to the Corinthians." The *A* and *B* were probably later additions to *Pros Korinthios*.

WATCH WORDS

- guarantee (deposit, pledge, down payment)—1:22 (also 5:5)
- trust (confidence)—5:4 (also 8:22)
- work (operation, activity; effectively produce)—4:12
- obedience (submission; to do what one is told)—10:5
- apostle (sent one)—12:12 (also 1:1)

Why Group Prayer Grows Our Gratitude

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:8–11

Habit: Gratitude

Throughout the New Testament are references to believers praying in groups (see Ac 1:14; 12:12). Why would we need to pray with others in public? Why can't we simply pray alone in private? In verses 1:8–11, Paul provides a clue to why corporate prayer is necessary.

God doesn't determine how he'll answer prayer by counting how many heads are bowed. The reason he wants us to pray together is the same reason for all prayer: to benefit us and bring glory to him. What Paul meant is that more prayer means more gratitude, which means more glory for God.

To understand the desirability of corporate prayer, consider two possibilities. In the first, a dozen people are each praying privately for Paul's deliverance, say, from prison in Philippi.

God delivers him, and as each of the 12 hears about it, they give thanks alone. Each person would individually thank God. Now consider another situation: that same dozen people gather together—like the disciples in Acts 12:12 praying for Peter's release from prison—and then word comes that God has answered their corporate prayers. In that situation, John Piper asks, "Would not their togetherness heighten their joy of thanksgiving?"

As Piper explains, it's human nature to feel gratitude more intensely when somebody you love is having the same experience with you.

First, I see the blessing of God in answer to many prayers, and then I look around and I see it again reflected and magnified in many grateful faces, and so my own gratitude is deepened and heightened by the group which prayed together and rejoiced together. And since God loves deepened and heightened gratitude, it is sure that if we pray earnestly in groups, we are putting ourselves in a position for great spiritual blessing from the Lord!¹

For many believers, the idea of gathering together for group prayer outside Sunday services provokes a range of emotions, from boredom (what could be more dull than sitting around praying?) to terror (what could be more frightening than praying aloud in public?). In foregoing corporate prayer, though, we're missing out on an opportunity to glorify God and grow in gratitude.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY: Group prayer means more gratitude, which means more glory for God.

In Greek, the word for the amount of ground covered by one foot—*bema*, a single pace (Acts 7:5)—ultimately referred to the step leading up to a raised platform and then the platform itself. Such platforms were common in biblical times, just as they are in ours. It is simply convenient for the one who is speaking to stand higher than those spoken to, as when Ezra the scribe mounted a raised platform to read the Law to the assembled postexilic Israelites in Jerusalem.

By NT times, *bema* was also used to refer to a throne—a seat for royalty higher than one's subjects—as in the throne of Herod (Acts 12:21). But with royalty came royal pronouncements and judgments, and *bema* became the word for "judgment seat." That is how it occurs most frequently in the NT. Pontius Pilate sat on a judgment seat when judging Christ (Matt. 27:19), and the apostle Paul stood before the judgment seat of various Roman officials (Acts 18:12; 25:6).

When it came time for Paul to choose an image to represent Christ's evaluation of His followers' lives at the end of the age, *bema* was the obvious choice: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (5:10; see also Rom. 14:10: "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ").

The phrase "good or bad" in 5:10 could lead one to think this judgment will be the basis of salvation—the "good" being saved, the "bad" unsaved. But salvation is not its purpose. Because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), no amount of good deeds can qualify a person for salvation. The reality of our sin since the Fall means that no effort, no matter how virtuous, will earn us merit toward salvation in God's eyes. Rather, this judgment is a believer's judgment, where Christ assesses their earthly works to determine rewards for faithfulness.

First Corinthians 3:11-15 is the clearest passage in the NT on Christ's judgment of believers. While Paul does not mention the judgment seat in this passage, it is certainly what he had in mind. Paul was addressing divisions in the church at Corinth—cliques of believers were following different leaders. Each leader is important, Paul writes, but God provides the results—"and each [person] will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:8). But the primary criterion for rewards is whether the work was done in the name of Jesus, for building up of the local church.

When Christ evaluates what believers have "constructed" with their lives, it will survive the fire of judgment if built with spiritual "gold, silver, [and] precious stones," but it will be consumed if built of "wood, hay, [and] straw" (1 Cor. 3:12). Work done for Christ and His glory will be rewarded; that which is revealed to have been not for Christ but for self will "suffer loss." The Christian will be saved, but his or her work will be destroyed along with the hope of rewards (1 Cor. 3:14, 15).

More than one kind of crown is mentioned in the NT, to be given to believers for their service: an "imperishable crown" (1 Cor. 9:25), a "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8), a "crown of life" (James 1:12), and a "crown of glory" (1 Pet. 5:4). Christ even issued a warning to the church in Philadelphia to remain strong in the faith "that no one may take your crown" (Rev. 3:11). There is reason to believe that those crowns will ultimately be returned to Christ as a way of honoring His glory and power (Rev. 4:10, 11).

Just as there will be degrees of punishment for those who have rejected God (Luke 12:47, 48), so it appears there will be degrees of reward for those who have served Christ faithfully (Luke 19:16-19). The most important aspect of the doctrine of rewards is that what we do in this life will impact the life beyond: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7). The promise of rewards tells us that "in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:9).

For Further Reading: Matt. 6:19-24; Rom. 14:10, 11; 1 Thess. 2:19, 20; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 1-3

What Is "Union With Christ"?

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Habit: Sanctification

One of the most profound and important theological principles of the Christian faith is built on a simple preposition: *in*.

The expression "in Christ" occurs 216 times in the letters of Paul and 26 times in the writings of John. "In" is the connective hinge of the doctrine referred to as "union with Christ."

Union with Christ, as Wayne Grudem explains, is a phrase used to summarize several different relationships between believers and Christ, through which Christians receive every benefit of salvation. These relationships include the fact that we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ and we are with Christ. These four aspects of the union affect our relationship both with Jesus and with other believers.²

The expression "in Christ" occurs 216 times in the letters of Paul and 26 times in the writings of John.

1. *We are in Christ*—Paul says "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2Co 5:17). This connection has implications not only for the future (the resurrection of our bodies) but also for the life we live now. As Grudem says, every action in our lives can be done "in Christ." If it is done in the power of his kingdom and in a way that brings honor to him.
2. *Christ is in us*—The reality that Christ dwells within believers has many profound consequences for how we treat other Christians, particularly those in need. This doctrine helps us to better understand what Jesus meant when he said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40).
3. *We are like Christ*—Our union with Christ is the primary motivation for our imitation of him. Paul frequently admonishes us to act in a way that models the behavior of Jesus (e.g., Ro 15:7; Eph 5:25; Col 3:3).
4. *We are with Christ*—Even though his body ascended to heaven, Jesus assures us that he is still with us (see Mt 28:20). Our Savior does not remain outside of us, simply leading the way to a better life, says Michael S. Horton. Rather, "we live in him and therefore in and for each other."³

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY: We can't make any progress on imitation of Christ until we become united to him.

Personal Gold

from JOE STOWELL

A NEW IDENTITY

In an early encounter with four rugged fishermen, Jesus welcomed them to a whole new identity, one that would be steady and definitive for them for the rest of their lives, an identity that would give them a life of adventure and significance, that would lead them to affect the world for generations to come. If you had met Andrew, Peter, James, or John on the street in their little fishing village in Galilee and had asked them who they were, they would no doubt have said, "Thanks for asking. We are fishermen."

Jesus was about to change all of that.

Matthew records the life-changing moment. Speaking of Jesus, he writes, "While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Matthew 4:18-20, ESV).

Jesus goes on to offer the same honor to James and John, who were mending nets in the boat with their father Zebedee. The offer was simple yet life-changingly profound. They could hang with fish and do the same thing over and over, day after day, or they could get past the nets and hear some amazing truths that would captivate their minds and confound the Bible bureaucrats and watch the lame walk again, the religious hypocrites burn with envy, and the dead come to life. Their choice.

And his offer to you is the same. It's your choice. You can stay stuck in the old routines and keep hoping that someday you will win the lottery, or you can unstuck yourself and let Jesus make something of your life. You can follow Jesus and, surprisingly, find that there is something more exhilarating than living life your way, in the confines of your instincts.

*Jesus' offer
is simple yet
life-changingly
profound.*

Unholy Alliances

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

EVERY MILITARY COMMANDER knows the consequences that can arise from becoming too friendly with the enemy during times of war. In this important passage, Paul warned against fraternizing with the enemy in the war between good and evil.

"Don't team up with those who are unbelievers," he wrote (2 Corinthians 6:14). Some Bible translations use the phrase "unequally yoked"—a rendering most often applied to choosing a marriage partner. Paul's words could also be applied to business partnerships and other relationships.

However, Paul didn't mean that Christians should avoid all contact with unbelievers. For example, he says in 1 Corinthians 5:10 that it would be impossible to stay away from people who engage in sexual sin: "You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that." What Paul is warning against is forming intimate alliances with people who do not share our love for Christ and our desire to serve God with our lives.

Whether in marriage or in business, there will be challenges enough without trying to navigate with a partner who has opposing views on good and evil—or whether there's even such a thing as "good" or "evil." The Bible clearly commands us to love all people, just as God does. But it is imperative to avoid teaming up with those who oppose our most deeply cherished values.

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES : STEWARDSHIP

ANOTHER WAY TO SAY "I LOVE YOU"

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Giving begins with the heart, not the checkbook. As Paul described the joy of the Macedonian Christians' giving he rejoiced in their motivation, because "they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us" (2 Corinthians 8:5). Their commitment led to their sacrifice.

Sacrifice means giving up something we value for something we value more. The Macedonian Christians sacrificed because they valued the work of sharing with sisters and brothers in Christ. The greatest sacrifice of all was made when Jesus Christ sacrificed his life because he valued our redemption. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Money can never be a substitute for words, but money can support our words. Our giving is one way to prove that love is real. A generous gift makes love visible in a practical way. That's why Paul speaks of the "grace of giving" (2 Corinthians 8:7). Our giving touches not only the physical needs of others but their hearts and souls as well.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

How do you use your financial and material resources to say "I love you"? Have you used them in ways that communicate a lack of care and love? Consider some specific ways you can communicate love by giving to the Lord's work and to others.

For more on stewardship, turn to 2 Corinthians 9.

THE HARVEST OF GIVING

2 Corinthians 9:6-10

These verses have often been interpreted as Scriptural promises that if we give to God, God will automatically give back to us wealth and health and many other blessings. Such teaching encourages us to give to God in order to get from God.

Experience teaches us, however, that many generous people live with ongoing financial pressures. As they continue to give sacrificially, God provides for their daily needs, but he doesn't always give them abundant wealth. Note also that the Bible doesn't teach us to give in order to get. The Bible says that we get in order to give. This reverse perspective makes all the difference. God blesses us so that we can give to others.

Instead of trying to manipulate God to nurture our selfish expectations, our giving should come as a response to God's blessing upon us.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

How has God blessed you? Think not only of financial resources but also of other blessings and talents he has given you. How could you "plant" these blessings and cultivate a greater harvest for the Lord?

For more on stewardship, turn to 1 Timothy 6.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:18

FOR REFLECTION Stabilized, Not Stressed • 11:24-28

It is a fact of life: if you sail long enough, you will encounter some choppy waters. Still, most stressful situations can be overcome through the principle of integration.

1. When we integrate our agenda with God's agenda—making them one agenda under Him—we remove most of the sources of stress in this life. Of course, this integration can only happen after we have carefully examined our own agenda. If it does not align with God's clear revelation in His Word, it is time to set our plans aside and submit to His.
2. God has a plan that can grow us so strong that we will have victory whenever stress comes. It is all about integrating the inner person with the outer person. The centerpiece of that plan is to build up the inner person to a position of strength. Outward stresses affect us most when we have not spent enough time strengthening the inner self by concentrating on the Word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the midst of suffering is not the ideal time to embark on a study of God's Word and character. Before adversity comes is the time to be diligent about writing His word on our hearts. Then, when trials come our way, we are ready to stand on the rock-solid foundation of His character in the midst of the storm. Those who stand on that foundation today will not be scrambling for it tomorrow!

2 CORINTHIANS 13:1

FWI A Final Test • 13:5, 6

This passage is often misunderstood as saying that assurance of salvation is found within ("test yourselves"). Looking within will only reveal our depravity and sin or a delusion that we are not depraved and sinful after all. Assurance that we are in the faith comes from without: through the Word of God, the production of fruit that endures, and a change over time from corruption to righteousness.

In this final challenge, Paul did not ask the Corinthians to look within to prove their own salvation; he asked them to find in their salvation a proof of his apostleship. If they were truly in the faith, Paul's apostleship was confirmed. If they were not, their judgment could not be believed.

Paul trusted that when the Corinthians tested their own faith and discovered it to be genuine, they would discover that Paul had passed the test as well.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10

Sickness

Will God heal us whenever we pray? The apostle Paul had an illness, and he prayed about it. God didn't

make him well. Instead, God promised to give Paul power. Paul was able to do great things

in spite of being ill. Sometimes

God has a reason for our sickness

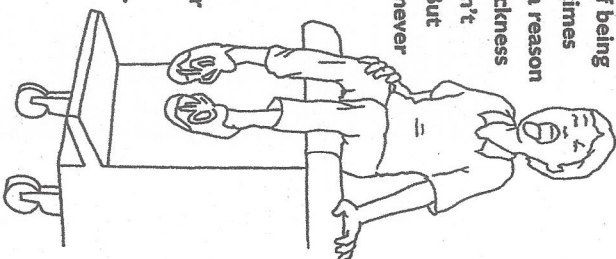
and doesn't heal us. But

God will never leave us

alone. He'll be

with us, giving us

his power and kindness.



alpe
can
be

In the Word

Because of outside opposition to his preaching, Paul spoke out in defense of his own ministry through three entire chapters of this book (chapters 10-12).

2 CORINTHIANS

KEY VERSES

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (4:17).

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9).

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (6:14).

"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness" (9:10).

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here" (5:17).

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (3:17).

BY THE NUMBERS

16 CHAPTERS
257 VERSES
6,247 WORDS

SOWING AND REAPING

Chapters 8 and 9 provide the most detailed teachings of generosity, financial giving and ministry support in the New Testament.

DID YOU KNOW?

► This letter is addressed to the church in Corinth, as well as to believers throughout the province of Achaia, of which Corinth was the capital city.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW 2 CORINTHIANS?

2 CORINTHIANS IN REVIEW

🕒 TIME TRAVELER

1. You co-wrote the book of 2 Corinthians with Paul. Who are you?

📖 MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

2. What Old Testament book did Paul quote when he accredited God as saying, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters"?

🔍 "???" CRYPTIC PHRASES

3. What was Silvanus?

- A. A river that flowed through Macedonia
B. An island Paul was to pass through on his way to Corinth
C. A name for Silas (in Greek)
D. A country that John had been exiled to near the island of Patmos

📖 MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

4. Where did Paul go but had no peace of mind because Titus wasn't there as he'd expected?

- A. Rome
B. The island of Crete
C. Troas
D. Timothy's house

❓ WHO SAID IT?

5. "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." Who does Paul quote here?

📖 MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

6. Where does Paul say we have treasures to show that all-surpassing power is from God and not from us?

👑 HOT SEAT

7. I was the king of Syria who had the governor of Damascus guard the city of Damascus in order to arrest Paul. Who am I?

📖 MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

8. How many times does Paul say he had received the "forty lashes minus one"?

❓ WHO SAID IT?

9. "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." From what book is Paul quoting?

👊 HOT SEAT

10. I am what God allowed to remain in Paul to keep him from becoming conceited. What am I?

❓ WHO SAID IT?

11. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." Who is Paul quoting when he says this?

📖 MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

12. What does Paul say is achieving for us an eternal glory?

- A. Our light and momentary troubles
B. Our kindness toward our neighbors
C. Our ability to preach the gospel
D. Our patience with our children

ANSWERS:

1. Timothy (1:1) 2. Samuel (10:17) 3. C (1:11) 4. C (2:12-13) 5. Jeremiah (10:17) 6. Acts of the Apostles (1:24) 7. Isaiah (62) 8. Isaiah (62) 9. Isaiah (62) 10. I am in his flesh (1:27) 11. Moses (1:13) 12. Deuteronomy (10:17) 13. A (4:17) 14. Timothy (1:1) 15. Samuel (10:17) 16. Acts of the Apostles (1:24) 17. Isaiah (62) 18. Isaiah (62) 19. Isaiah (62) 20. I am in his flesh (1:27) 21. Moses (1:13) 22. Deuteronomy (10:17) 23. A (4:17)