

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians Intro

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**Date:** AD 55, before winter

(1 Corinthians AD 55, before Pentecost)

**Purpose:** Paul guides the Corinthian congregation to evaluate his ministry truly as Christ's work among them.

**Luther on 2 Corinthians:** In the first epistle, St. Paul rebuked the Corinthians severely for many things, pouring sharp wine into their wounds [Luke 10:34] and frightening them. But an apostle should be a preacher of comfort, to raise up terrified and fearful consciences, rather than to frighten them. Therefore in this epistle he praises them once more and pours oil into their wounds [Luke 10:34]. He shows himself wonderfully kind to them and bids them to receive the sinner back with love.

In chapters 1 and 2 he shows his love toward them, how all that he said, did, and suffered was for their profit and benefit, and how they ought to trust him for the best.

After that, in chapters 3, 4, and 5, he praises the office of the gospel, which is the highest and most comforting of all works and is for the profit and benefit of men's consciences. He shows how [the gospel] is nobler than the office of the law, also how it is persecuted, and yet increases among believers and produces through the cross a hope of eternal glory. But with all this he touches the false apostles, who were [teaching] the law over against the gospel, teaching mere outward holiness—that is, hypocrisy—and allowing the inner shame of unbelief to continue.

In chapters 6 and 7 he exhorts them to implement this kind of preaching in the things they do and suffer. He concludes by praising them, so that he may encourage them to carry on.

In chapters 8 and 9 he exhorts them to contribute also material aid and help in time of scarcity to

the saints in Jerusalem, who from the outset had given over all their possessions, Acts 4[:34–35].

In chapters 10, 11, and 12 he deals with the false apostles.

In chapter 13 he threatens those who had sinned and not reformed. (AE 35:383–84)

**Challenges for Readers:** The setting for Paul's Letter and the issues he addressed present many challenges for interpreters. Here are some of the most important issues:

Lack of Unity. Paul's composition seems to start and stop often and also displays strong changes in mood. Due to this, some commentators have suggested that 2 Corinthians is actually a collection of as many as five different writings by Paul. There is certainly a significant change of mood at ch 10, but this could have taken place because Paul received new word on the situation at Corinth. Nothing in the present Letter demands that it was a collection written for different occasions.

### Letters and Visits.

Paul visited Corinth during his second missionary journey (Ac 18:1–17) in AD 50. He later wrote a letter of instruction to them [<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:9** *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people...*], which has been lost.

Paul's next Letter to them was 1 Corinthians, which may be the painful letter mentioned in 2 Co 2:4 [<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Corinthians 2:4** *For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.*] (though some scholars have assumed this refers to another lost letter written after 1 Corinthians).

He also apparently made a "painful visit" to the congregation [<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Corinthians 2:1** *For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.*],

which made it possible for Titus to follow up and settle the conflicts [<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Corinthians 7:6-8** *But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it-- though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while.*].

Paul then wrote 2 Corinthians in AD 55. So, Paul may have written a total of four letters, as follows:

- (1) A letter of instruction (1Co 5:9)
- (2) 1 Corinthians
- (3) A painful letter (2Co 2:4)
- (4) 2 Corinthians

All this effort paid off. Clement of Rome wrote at the end of the first century that God held together this troubled congregation.

*A Personal Letter.* In 2 Corinthians, Paul lays bare his heart to the congregation and vigorously defends his apostleship against false apostles who tried to undermine his work. He writes much more about himself and his feelings than he does in his other Letters. Readers need to bear these personal qualities in mind when applying the Letter (e.g., just because Paul boasted rhetorically to the Corinthians does not mean that we must boast before our congregations).

*The Reconciled Brother.* The congregational member in ch 2 may be the same person who was excommunicated in 1Co 5, though Paul does not make this absolutely clear. In both cases, the sin involved has caused significant suffering for Paul and for the congregation.

**Blessings for Readers:** As you study 2 Corinthians, consider the marvelous example Paul gives of a thoughtful Christian leader striving to unite a wounded congregation. Note especially how he emphasizes God's work among them through the Gospel, which comforts and heals the congregation. If you have experienced disappointments and hurt feelings at church, allow 2 Corinthians to assist in your healing.

Paul also describes the generous heart of those who have received God's grace. He contrasts the faithful Macedonian believers, so ready to give to the poor and needy, with the disorganized and begrudging Corinthians, who question Paul's motives for collecting the offering. God grant us wise and generous hearts that think clearly about giving for the needs of others!

#### Outline:

- I. Salutation (1:1–2)
- II. Blessed Be the God of Comfort (1:3–7)
- III. Pastoral Reflection on Interaction with the Corinthians (1:8–5:10)
- IV. Apostolic Appeal to Be Reconciled to God and to His Ministers (5:11–7:16)
- V. Logistics and Encouragement to Participate in the Jerusalem Collection (chs 8–9)
- VI. Paul Appeals for Corinthians to Acknowledge His Apostolic Authority (ch 10)
- VII. Paul Responds to the Accusations of the "Super-Apostles" (11:1–13:10)
- VIII. Closing (13:11–14)

**ESV Bible 2 Corinthians Introduction:** Paul's second letter to the Corinthians discusses some of the things previously addressed but also deals with new issues. While 1 Corinthians called for believers to be unified with each other, in this letter Paul urges the church to be unified with him in his ministry. Paul's opponents were undermining his work, claiming that his suffering (11:24–29) proved he was not a true apostle. Paul responds that his suffering highlights his dependence on Christ, as it points to Christ's strength rather than his own. Second Corinthians includes stirring perspectives on gospel ministry (chs. 2–5), encouragements to holy living (chs. 6–7), and instructions about giving (chs. 8–9). Paul wrote this letter from Macedonia a year after writing 1 Corinthians, about A.D. 56.

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 1:1-24

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### Greeting: 1:1-2

- 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God [the Father], and Timothy our brother [in Christ], To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. // Paul addressed this letter to the believers in Christ in Corinth as well as those in Achaia – the Roman province where Corinth was located, indicating Christianity had spread beyond the city of Corinth. Corinth was the administrative capital of Achaia.

### God of All Comfort: 1:3-11

- <sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. <sup>5</sup> For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.
  - comforts us*. First and foremost, a Christian's comfort comes through the message of reconciliation with God through the work of Jesus Christ (5:17–20). This Letter also shows how believers are agents of God's consolation and comfort for others (cf 7:5–9).
  - affliction*. It can include persecution as well as the current Coronavirus and other ways in which we suffer. As God carries us through and comforts us, so – by going through the process – we learn how to help others in their times of need.
- <sup>6</sup> If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you

patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. <sup>7</sup> Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

- Think about this passage: "...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom. 5:3-4 ESV); for more on those verses, see the BLC sermon from 3-15-20.
  - Suffering is never pleasant, but God can use it to bless us, and then others through us!
- <sup>8</sup> For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. // Think about those words:
    - In Asia Paul experienced much persecution for sharing the Gospel; see Acts 19, which tells what happened to him in Ephesus.
    - Notice how God brought much good from much bad: God permitted Paul to get into a situation where he "despaired of life itself," so that his death seemed almost certain. A horrible situation, but look at the good outcome: The bad situation caused Paul to stop looking to himself for his very life, but to look to God, who raises the dead. Let us always do the same; we are weak, but He is STRONG!
  - <sup>10</sup> He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. <sup>11</sup> You also must help us by prayer, so that many will

give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. // When God does deliver us, as He will from our present state of the Coronavirus, let us give Him thanks AND let us have even greater confidence in Him for whenever the next time of affliction is permitted into our lives.

### Paul's Change of Plans: 1:12-24

6. <sup>12</sup> For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. <sup>13</sup> For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand— <sup>14</sup> just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.
  - a. Boasting sounds wrong for Christians, but, in some cases, it is okay and even encouraged.
  - b. One of the greatest joys in life is that someone comes to faith in Jesus because they heard the Gospel from you. If God does such work in connection with us, we will have much joy and can boast in the work God did, but let us remember that we can only plant and water, *God must cause the growth*. So let us always give Him the glory and point others to Him!
7. <sup>15</sup> Because I was sure of this [that God is at work through my ministry], I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace [a second visit which would help correct your errors and build you up in God's truth].
8. <sup>16</sup> I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. <sup>17</sup> Was I vacillating [indecisive] when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time? <sup>18</sup> As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been

Yes and No. <sup>19</sup> For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. <sup>20</sup> For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him [Christ] that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. <sup>21</sup> And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, <sup>22</sup> and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

- a. Opponents were accusing Paul of being fickle in his care of the Corinthian Church. They falsely claimed that he was afraid to be bold in person (cf 10:10). Paul ultimately defends not himself but the ministry of Jesus that comes in apparent weakness and foolishness (cf 1Co 1:18; 2Co 4; 13:4).
  - b. *Yes ... No*. Paul does not say one thing and mean the other. God is faithful, and Paul's ministry as God's representative is faithful too (1:1).
  - c. *in Him it is always Yes*. The message of Jesus Christ is the reconciliation, the forgiveness for the world (cf Jn 12:47). In Christ alone, God fulfilled all His OT promises of redemption.
  - d. *Amen*. Understanding Jesus' incredible work on behalf of the world calls for the response of faith—"Amen," or "Let it be so for me."
  - e. *guarantee*. The Holy Spirit received in Baptism is God's "deposit" of His continued faithfulness. See Ephesians 1:13-14
9. <sup>23</sup> But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. <sup>24</sup> Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith. // *witness against me*. Paul defends his ministry among the Corinthians, calling God Himself—the one who chose (v 1) and dispatched him to serve them—to vindicate his thoughts and actions.

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 2:1-17

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### Paul's Change of Plans: 1:12-24 – Continued

1. **Chapter 2** For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. // *So an earlier visit was painful.* Paul's second visit was to resolve conflicts. Resolving conflicts is not easy, and can be painful, but conflicts should not be allowed to persist.
  - a. Can you think of any current conflicts in our congregation? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. If yes, what can we do to resolve them?
2. <sup>2</sup> For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? // When we hurt someone and feel bad about it, only that person's forgiveness can remove the bad feeling from us.
3. <sup>3</sup> And I wrote as I did [a reference to something Paul wrote, either in 1 Corinthians, or possibly in a painful letter that has been lost], so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. // When we call someone to account, we don't know how they will react... with repentance and reconciliation, or with anger and rejection. Paul was hoping for the first response!
4. <sup>4</sup> For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. // Paul demonstrates both sincere motives for his work in Corinth and the willingness of the Gospel ministry to serve others for their sake. He contrasts his motives and message with that of the super-apostles (1Co 4:9–16; 2Co 11:13), who were actually false prophets. // <sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 4:9** For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.

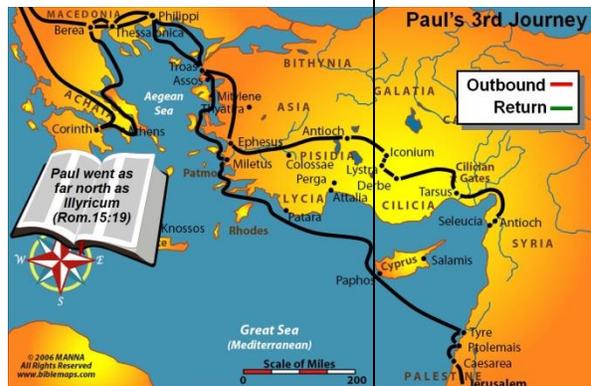
### Forgive the Sinner: 2:5-11

5. <sup>5</sup> Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. // That is a possible reference to the man in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, who was having sexual relations with his stepmother and was called out by Paul with very strong words. He was causing pain to the whole congregation – *because they knew about it and let it go.*
6. <sup>6</sup> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup> so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. //
  - a. When sin is public, it reflects on the whole congregation. Some likely wanted the punishment to be even more severe.
  - b. The discipline had brought about repentance. Forgiveness and reconciliation are always the goal of discipline and punishment. Forgiveness of sins, not perfection, is the chief characteristic of the Church.
  - c. *excessive sorrow*. ...to continue to criticize a remorseful person after repentance defeats discipline's purpose.
  - d. Whatever the actual situation, the person did repent; therefore, Paul is telling them the importance of extending forgiveness, comfort, and restoration, since Paul had written: "...you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:5 ESV).
7. <sup>8</sup> So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. <sup>9</sup> For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.
  - a. *test you*. Lit, "know your proof, your evidence" to see if you are faithful in this matter.

- b. *obedient in everything*. The Corinthians had been obedient in the process of discipline. Paul wants them to be as faithful in forgiveness and restoration. // As God's forgiveness is amazing, so may ours be the same: <sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 103:12** as far as the east is from the west, so far does [the LORD] remove our transgressions from us.
8. <sup>10</sup> Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup> so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.
- a. *I also forgive*. Discipline was a shared exercise, so forgiveness was shared too.
- b. *for your sake*. The exercise of discipline was not only for a person who sinned, but for the sake of the Church itself. They, too, were called to be faithful in discipline and forgiveness as Christ's people.
- c. *outwitted by Satan*. To misuse the process of discipline as some legalistic punishment or some method of humiliating a repentant sinner would turn Christ's Church into a cesspool of self-righteousness. Paul warns against this satanic twist.

### Triumph in Christ: 2:12-17

9. <sup>12</sup> When I came to Troas [a port city on the west coast of present-day Turkey] to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, <sup>13</sup> my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother [in Christ] Titus there. So I took leave of them [at Troas] and went on to Macedonia. // Paul was conflicted; he was given an open door in Troas, yet he was so concerned about Titus that he went on to



Macedonia – *hoping to find Titus there*. It's important for us to realize how little control we have. Then, let us trust in God, be at peace, and know He is working all things out for the good of believers.

10. <sup>14</sup> But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. <sup>15</sup> For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?
- a. *fragrance ... the aroma of Christ*. Temple sacrifices produced smells we would associate with grilling meat or cooking bread. The pleasing aroma of Christ's sacrifice on the cross covers the stench of our sin.
- b. *life to life*. Paul's life of sacrifice brings life to unbelievers.
11. <sup>17</sup> For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.
- a. *peddlers*. Paul contrasts his ministry with those who peddle God's Word for personal profit.
- b. *commissioned by God*. Paul was authorized by and accountable to God Himself for what he proclaimed to the Corinthians.

**Summary of 2:12-17:** Paul's spirit is restless and overwhelmed in the circumstances of his ministry. Nonetheless, he is confident that Christ will accomplish His work for the Corinthians.

As Christians, we often feel the very real weight of representing Christ to others. Our worries, sins, and frailties can overwhelm us. We can take heart that Christ Jesus is always sufficient and that His message of forgiveness for us is also a sweet fragrance to all who trust in Him.

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 3:1 – 4:6

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### Ministers of the New Covenant: 3:1-18

1. **3** Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? <sup>2</sup>You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. <sup>3</sup>And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.
  - a. Paul has no need to establish his credibility with the Corinthians. His authority comes from Christ's commission (Ac 9:1–15).
  - b. *letters of recommendation*. Businessmen or officials often sent authorizing letters on behalf of their messengers. The Corinthians knew Paul intimately (cf Ac 18:1–17); he needed no affirmation...
  - c. *written ... with the Spirit*. Paul's ministry to them was first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit.
2. <sup>4</sup>Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God [that the Spirit is working in your lives]. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup>who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
  - a. "Since the natural powers of mankind cannot do anything [to convert themselves]... God, out of His infinite goodness and mercy, comes first to us. He causes His Holy Gospel to be preached. The Holy Spirit desires to work and accomplish this conversion and renewal in us. Through preaching and meditation on His Word God kindles faith and other godly virtues in us..." (FC SD II 71). // Did you notice the steps in that paragraph?
    - i. God the Father causes people to preach both law and gospel.
    - ii. God the Holy Spirit works through such preaching to show people God's truth and give them faith in Jesus.
    - iii. God the Holy Spirit grows the understanding of the converted and gives them godly desires.
3. <sup>7</sup>Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone [that is, the Ten Commandments (Romans 3:20; 6:23)], came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, <sup>8</sup>will not the ministry of the Spirit [that is, the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus and His finished work] have even more glory? <sup>9</sup>For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.
  - a. OT and NT glory comparison:
    - i. <sup>ESV</sup> **Exodus 34:34-35** Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining.
    - ii. <sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 17:2** And [Jesus] was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.
  - b. *ministry of condemnation*. God serves us [through the Law] by spiritually exposing the futility and destructiveness of human self-righteousness, which brings condemnation.

- c. *ministry of righteousness*. Jesus serves us [through the Gospel] by fulfilling the Law (Mt 5:17), taking upon Himself the curse of the world's sin (5:21; Gal 3:13), and giving His righteousness for the salvation of the world (cf 1Co 1:30).
4. <sup>10</sup> Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. <sup>11</sup> For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. // Again, Paul is talking about Law and Gospel; the Law has glory as it shows us our need for Jesus, *but the Gospel has much more glory as it saves us from our sins!*
  5. <sup>12</sup> Since we have such a hope [in the Gospel, thus in Jesus], we are very bold, <sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. // When Moses first came from God's presence, his face was shining brightly, *but then it dimmed over time*. With Jesus' work, *it is finished, it will not dim, and it is fully available for everyone's eternal benefit!*
  6. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. // Many in the world normally gather in church and hear God's Word; however, *when they gather with a closed heart and mind – thinking they already know the truth*, they have quenched the work of the Spirit and remain in their spiritual blindness.
  7. <sup>16</sup> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. // On Pentecost – *50 days after Jesus was raised*, the Spirit worked through Peter's preaching to cause people to turn to the Lord. First—*they realized their sin*, second—*they were called to repent*, and third—*they were baptized in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of their sins*.

8. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. // *degree of glory*. Describes moving from the glory of those exposed to their deadness in sin, to the glory of being declared righteous in Christ, to the glory of becoming more like Jesus day by day.

#### The Light of the Gospel: 4:1-6

1. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, having this ministry [this teaching and preaching of God's Word among you] by the mercy of God [not that we have earned our positions, but we have them as His gifts to us], we do not lose heart [not become discouraged, because God is using us according to His will].
2. <sup>2</sup> But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience [God-given awareness] in the sight of God. // Paul wants the Corinthians to be certain that he never changed God's Word for his benefit; instead, *he always told them God's truth*.
3. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing [to those rejecting the Holy Scriptures, or hearing them with closed minds and hearts]. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. // *the light of the gospel*. Satan's work is to "darken" hearts and minds. However, the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins through Jesus, remains a clear and visible light to the whole world, even though some have closed their eyes to it (cf Jn 3:19; Eph 4:19).
4. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. // Paul was a servant of Jesus, *serving among the Corinthians for their eternal benefit!*

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 4:7 – 5:12

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### Treasure in Jars of Clay: 4:7-18

5. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure [of the Gospel, *God's work of salvation*] in jars of clay [*in frail human bodies*], to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.
6. Paul wrote these words to help the Corinthians understand both the difficulties of his life and those with him, and the help God provides in every circumstance: <sup>8</sup> We are
  - a. afflicted [*literally pressed, squeezed*] in every way, but not crushed;
  - b. perplexed [*in doubt, uncertain*], but not driven to despair [*knowing that God is ultimately in control*];
  - c. <sup>9</sup> persecuted [*being treated in a hostile manner by others*], but not forsaken [*abandoned by God*];
  - d. struck down [*by those who oppose us*], but not destroyed [*not put to death, which will not happen until God permits it*];
  - e. <sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus [*His death for our sins*], so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. // Jesus lived for us and died for us; now we die to sin and live for Him!
  - f. <sup>11</sup> For we who live [for Jesus] are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake [*to promote His saving work*], so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested [*displayed*] in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup> So death is at work in us [*as we are mistreated*], but life in you [*as you benefit from our ministry*].
7. <sup>13</sup> Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, <sup>14</sup> knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.
  - a. *same spirit of faith*. Believers from every generation and time possess the same

faith in God's Word, which delivers a spirit of perseverance to speak of God's grace no matter the cost.

- b. *I believed ... I spoke*. Just as David boldly trusted in the Lord and proclaimed His grace (cf Ps 145:1–8), so Paul boldly proclaimed the same Lord.
8. <sup>15</sup> For it is all for your sake [*the benefit of you Corinthians*], so that as grace [*God's undeserved love and salvation*] extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.
9. <sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart [*become discouraged, give up*]. Though our outer self [*our physical body*] is wasting away, our inner self [*our life in Christ*] is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient [*temporary*], but the things that are unseen are eternal. // Can life be difficult for believers as they follow the Bible and tell others about Jesus? Yes! However, the difficulties are *minor and temporary* in comparison to our wonderful eternity with God! Therefore, we should not focus on what we can see, but, instead, we should focus on God's yet-to-be-fulfilled promises for those who continue in Jesus to the end!

### Our Heavenly Dwelling: 5:1-10

1. <sup>5</sup> For we know that if the tent [*the physical body*] that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens [*the resurrected and eternal body, which will be received when Jesus returns*].
2. <sup>2</sup> For in this tent [*the physical body*] we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling [*the*

resurrected body], <sup>3</sup> if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked [thus without the righteousness of Jesus].

3. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent [the physical body], we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed [that we would physically die and that would be it], but that we would be further clothed [being resurrected and changed from mortal to immortal], so that what is mortal [temporary] may be swallowed up by life [in Christ, thus alive in Christ, living for Christ, and sharing Christ].
4. <sup>5</sup> He who has prepared us for this very thing [being alive in Christ now and forever] is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. // The Spirit was given to live within us when we were baptized into Christ. We do not yet have our immortal bodies, but, since we have the Spirit, we should be sure that countless eternal blessings are yet to come!
5. <sup>6</sup> So we are always of good courage [confident in God's promises]. We know that while we are at home in the body [physically alive] we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body [out of this sinful world] and at home with the Lord. // When we die in Christ, God does bring us home – soul and spirit, waiting for the day of Jesus' return and to be raised imperishable!
6. <sup>9</sup> So whether we are at home or away [physically alive or with God in heaven], we make it our aim to please him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
  - a. *judgment seat of Christ.* At the final judgment, Jesus will personally judge the living and the dead (Ac 17:31; 2Tm 4:1). This is the day of the Lord, when all people will stand before His throne (1Co 1:8; 2Co 1:14; 2Pt 3:10).
  - b. *what is due.* Not works-righteousness, for all are dead in sin without Christ and

saved by grace alone (Eph 2:8–9; Rm 2:11–16; 3:9–20). Paul means what is due by faith... God's grace is so abundant that even the works He graciously provides, He rewards.

### The Ministry of Reconciliation: 5:11 – 6:13

7. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. // Each of us knows what it's like to have a friend or family member suddenly pop in on us and make us jump right out of our skin. The fear evoked by the sudden appearance of the angel of the Lord is repeatedly mentioned in the Scriptures, from the prophet Moses to the Virgin Mary. But "the fear of the LORD" is something more than surprise or terror.
  - a. Proverbs teaches that, far from cowering in dread before the Lord, the person who fears the Lord clings to Him.
  - b. Solomon's father, King David (reigned 1009–970 BC), summed it up well: I sought the LORD, and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears.... The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them.... Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints, for those who fear Him have no lack! (Ps 34:4, 7, 9).
  - c. In other words, when we fear God, there is nothing to be afraid of!
8. <sup>12</sup> We are not commending ourselves [making our approval known] to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. // For the false apostles who had come among the Corinthians, they boasted about themselves – *their outward appearance*, yet Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that his heart is for Christ and what is eternal, and he wanted the same for them!

This section continues on page 11.

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 5:13 – 7:1

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### The Ministry of Reconciliation: 5:11 – 6:13 – Continued

9. <sup>13</sup> For if we are beside ourselves [*insane*], it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.
- In the eyes of some, Paul and those with him appeared to be insane, yet, in reality, *they were boldly following God's Word for the eternal benefit of the Corinthians!*
  - They were not controlled by selfish motives or by fear, *but by the love of Christ!* As Jesus lived and died for us, so, regarding those who live in connection with Jesus, *it is only right that they would live for Jesus!*
10. <sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.
- To regard others according to the flesh could be to value them based on their appearance, health, wealth, power, etc.
  - Paul used to see Jesus as only a man, yet, by God's grace, he began to see Him as the Christ, the Promised Savior.
  - Then, as Paul looked at others, his focus was especially on their eternal wellbeing.
11. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.
- What does it mean to be a Christian? It means that God has put us "in Christ"!

We were separated from God and dead in our sins, so God sent His Son to remove the sins of the world; then God, by the Holy Spirit, working through Baptism and through the Bible (which are the means of grace), brought us into a right relationship with Himself through Jesus.

- Now that God has reconciled us to Himself, He wants to work in conjunction with us and our testimony of Jesus to reconcile others unto Himself. Therefore, we are called to be salt – *to preserve the world from total corruption*, and light – *to shine God's truth to others*, so that God, by the Spirit, might set them free by grace through faith in Jesus.
12. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we [*Paul and those working with him*] are ambassadors [*representatives*] for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he [*God the Father*] made him [*Jesus, the God-Man*] to be sin [*Isaiah 53:6*] who knew no sin [*Hebrews 4:15*], so that in him [*Jesus*] we might become the righteousness of God.
- What is required for our entrance into heaven? *The righteousness of God!*
  - Since it is impossible for us to acquire it through work, money, etc., *God gifts us with His righteousness through Jesus!*
1. **6 Working together with him [*Jesus*], then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God [*His gift of salvation*] in vain [*in a manner that is not actually beneficial*]. <sup>2</sup> For he [*God the Father*] says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." [*Isaiah 49:8*] Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. // **God's favor is being offered now to the Corinthians, and Paul pleads with them not to take this offer lightly.** As we become aware of a person**

doing the same today, *let us plead with that person and pray for him/her!*

2. <sup>3</sup>We put no obstacle in anyone's way [*he was the messenger, not the message*], so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup>but as servants of God we commend [*recommend*] ourselves in every way:
  - a. by great endurance [*not giving up in spite of difficulties*],
  - b. in afflictions [*tribulation, literally pressure*],
  - c. hardships [*being in need*],
  - d. calamities [*difficulties*],
  - e. <sup>5</sup>beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger;
  - f. <sup>6</sup>by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love;
  - g. <sup>7</sup>by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left [*Word and Sacraments, prayer, sacrificial service*];
  - h. <sup>8</sup>through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise.
  - i. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup>as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed;
  - j. <sup>10</sup>as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. // Through all that is listed above, Paul claims that none of these circumstances affected his faithful sharing of the ministry of God's reconciliation with others. It's so amazing what Paul endured as a servant of Christ; may God inspire us to live for Him by showing true love to others!
3. <sup>11</sup>We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. <sup>12</sup>You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. <sup>13</sup>In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.
  - a. *as to children*. Paul's appeal to them is as a loving father (1Co 4:15).
  - b. *widen your hearts*. Paul, in appealing to their hearts, is not simply calling them back to himself. He is calling them back to Christ, who can make His light shine in

their hearts (4:6). Restored to Jesus, their hearts could again be wide open to Paul.

**Summary of 5:11 – 6:13:** Christ's love compels Paul to persevere through all hardships to make God's offer of... reconciliation plain to the people at Corinth. Too often we mute the Gospel's power because of our pride, our carelessness, or our lack of concern for others. No greater honor can be given us than to be... His spokes-people. He not only saves us but also works through us.

#### **The Temple of the Living God: 6:14 – 7:1**

4. <sup>14</sup>Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness [*someone controlled by the new nature*] with lawlessness [*someone controlled by the old nature*]? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup>What accord has Christ with Belial [*Hebrew for "wicked" or "worthless"; a title for Satan.*]? Or what portion [*what in common*] does a believer share with an unbeliever?
5. <sup>16</sup>What agreement has the temple of God [*the place where the living God dwells*] with idols [*which are dead*]? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people [*cited from Leviticus 26:12*]."
6. <sup>17</sup>Therefore go out from their midst [*from unbelievers*], and be separate from them [*in regard to close relationships, but not in regard to sharing Christ with them*], says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, <sup>18</sup>and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty [*cited from Isaiah 52:11*]." // <sup>ESV</sup> **Leviticus 20:26** You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.
1. <sup>7</sup>Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. // *cleanse ourselves*. Though the Christian is declared clean by Christ's righteous sacrifice (1Co 1:30; 1Pt 2:24), repentance [*sorrow and faith*] and forgiveness remain daily activities of the Christian life (Gal 5:24–6:4; 1Jn 2:1).

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 7:2 – 8:9

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### Paul's Joy: 7:2-16

2. Paul wanted a right and close relationship with the believers in Corinth: <sup>2</sup> Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. <sup>3</sup> I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together *[dying in Christ to sin and living a new life together by the Holy Spirit's power]*. <sup>4</sup> I am acting with great boldness *[confidence]* toward you; I have great pride in you *[much boasting concerning you – as I hear of you living for Christ]*; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction *[as we suffer for Christ]*, I am overflowing with joy. // For Paul, the faith and life in Christ of the Corinthians was more important than his own comfort. *May God work that same attitude for others within us!*
3. <sup>5</sup> For even when we came into Macedonia *[a region in northern Greece]*, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within *[outward struggles against people hostile to the Gospel; such response brought inward fear to those who preached Christ]*. <sup>6</sup> But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, <sup>7</sup> and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.
  - a. What was Paul's concern? That the Corinthians were no longer in Christ! So God brought comfort: First, Titus was comforted as he talked directly with the Corinthians; then, Paul was comforted by the news from Titus.
  - b. Are you concerned about the salvation of others? *Nothing is more important!* There are only two eternal options – wonderful and horrible; Jesus is the only

- way to wonderful; all who ignore or reject Jesus will experience the horrible forever!
- c. How are YOU taking action to help others know Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_
4. <sup>8</sup> For even if I made you grieve with my letter *[possibly a letter which was written between the writing of 1CO and 2CO, yet has been lost]*, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while *[like tough love, which initially hurts, but ultimately helps]*. <sup>9</sup> As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. // It's not easy to use God's Word of Law to point out the sins of others – *since we all have our own*. However, the Holy Spirit can work through such means to show a person his sin and make him sorry. Then, *through God's Word of Gospel*, the H.S. can rekindle faith in Jesus and impart forgiveness!
  5. <sup>10</sup> For godly grief *[sincere grief or sorrow that is in agreement with God's Word]* produces a repentance *[change]* that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief *[insincere grief or sorrow that is not in agreement with God's Word]* produces death. // God's Law produces the proper sorrow, while God's Gospel produces the proper joy! Sadly we live at a time when many are unwilling to hear or believe God's Holy Word; therefore, they cut themselves off from God's chosen means to show them the truth and save them through Jesus.
  6. <sup>11</sup> For see what earnestness *[genuine commitment of zeal]* this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves,
    - a. what indignation *[expression of strong displeasure]*,

- b. what fear [*respect for those in authority*],
  - c. what longing [*earnest desire*],
  - d. what zeal [*enthusiasm*],
  - e. what punishment [*desire to see that justice is done*]!
7. At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. <sup>12</sup> So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. <sup>13</sup> Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.
- a. Paul wanted them to recognize fully the genuineness of his service to them on God's behalf.
  - b. Titus was relieved, for the congregation's problems were dealt with in repentance and forgiveness. Their desire to mend what was broken also brought Paul deep comfort and peace of mind.
8. <sup>14</sup> For whatever boasts I made to [Titus] about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. <sup>15</sup> And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. <sup>16</sup> I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

**Summary of 7:2-16:** Paul shares the ups and downs of ministry and his great joy in hearing that the Corinthians' faith in Christ was solid again.... To open up our hearts to others, to let them know of Christ's love, is to experience again the joy of that great love of God for all.

#### **Encouragement to Give Generously: 8:1-15**

1. **8** We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God [*in this case, the mutual generosity among Christians*] that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and

their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

- a. After Paul and Silas's rough reception in Macedonia (Ac 16:19–17:15), their converts suffered violent persecution (cf 1Th 1:6; 2:14; 2Th 1:4).
  - b. The Macedonian Christians were excessive in sacrificial generosity and joyful under duress.
2. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—<sup>5</sup> and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.
- a. *begging*. In contrast with the Corinthians' concerns about money, the Macedonians regarded assisting their destitute fellow believers in Judea as a privilege. What is our attitude about helping?
  - b. *first to the Lord*. The core of stewardship is a complete gift of self, in body and soul, to the Lord who bought us; time, talent, and treasure follow in due course.
3. <sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup> But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. // Titus shall resume his supervision of efforts to collect funds for Judean relief, likely begun when he delivered the tearful letter mentioned in 2:4 and broken off when he left the city with encouraging news for Paul.
4. <sup>8</sup> I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. <sup>9</sup> For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. // *Our actions speak much louder than our words!* As the Son of God acted for us, and the Macedonians for those in need, *so let us take action for others – especially for them to know Jesus!*

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 8:10 – 9:9

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### Encouragement to Give Generously: 8:1-15 – Continued

5. Three parts of giving are desiring, beginning, and finishing: <sup>10</sup> And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. <sup>11</sup> So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. // Some desire, *but never begin*, and some begin, *but never finish*. In all that is right and pleasing to God, let us desire, begin, and finish!
6. How much to give and why: <sup>12</sup> For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. <sup>13</sup> For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness <sup>14</sup> your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. <sup>15</sup> As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”
- a. God is fair, and calls us to be fair – *by calling us to give based on what we have received:*
- From one dollar, *God calls for a dime.*
  - From \$1,000, *God calls for \$100.*
  - From \$1 mil, *God calls for \$100k.*
- b. Over the years some have told me: Pastor, I will begin giving *as soon as God gives me more*. But it doesn't work that way; Jesus said, “...give, and it will be given to you” (Luke 6:38 ESV). In other words, FIRST, the people should have given from what they had received; then, SECOND, in response to their faithful giving, *God would have given them more!*

- c. When we know of people in need, God calls us to help according to our means; then, when we find ourselves in need, God will raise up others to help us!
- d. The quote is from Exodus 16:18, regarding the manna that God sent to the people for food; God in His goodness provided what each person needed!
- e. By the way – Thanks be to God for His work to move our members and others to show much generosity toward Bethlehem during the past few months!

**Summary of 8:1-15:** *The Macedonians forgot themselves as they gave to others as though there were no tomorrow.* God also calls us to give generously, because He endows us with earthly things for our neighbors' benefit. God's Son, the wealthiest of princes, became the most abject [*humble*] of slaves and gave His all to enrich poor sinners as His royal Bride.

### Commendation of Titus: 8:16-24

7. <sup>16</sup> But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you [*the believers in Corinth*]. <sup>17</sup> For he [*Titus*] not only accepted our appeal [*persistent request*], but being himself very earnest [*eager*] he is going to you of his own accord [*free will, voluntarily*].
8. <sup>18</sup> With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. // It's not certain who that is, but it might be Luke – the writer of the third account of the gospel.
9. <sup>19</sup> And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. <sup>20</sup> We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being

administered by us, <sup>21</sup> for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. // Giving can be encouraged by these factors:

- a. Give and it will be given to you!
  - b. Those who handle what is given are trustworthy!
  - c. What is given will be used as planned!
10. <sup>22</sup> And with them we are sending our brother [in this gospel ministry (another person whose name is unknown to us)] whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.
11. <sup>23</sup> As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit [as he would travel to Corinth as Paul's representative]. And as for our brothers [those mentioned in vv. 18 and 22], they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. <sup>24</sup> So give proof before the churches of your love [for God and others] and of our boasting about you to these men. // How were they being called up to prove their love?

#### The Collection for Christians in Jerusalem: 9:1-5

1. <sup>9</sup> Now it is superfluous [excessive] for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints [that is, the relief for the believers in Jerusalem], <sup>2</sup> for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. // At this point, the Macedonians had already given generously (8:1-5); they did so in part because Paul had challenged them with the desire of the Corinthians – almost as a competition. However, at this point, the Corinthians had not yet given, so Paul is now trying to encourage them to take action!
2. <sup>3</sup> But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. <sup>4</sup> Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to

say nothing of you—for being so confident. // Paul, in a sense, had put his reputation on the line with his boasting about the Corinthians to the Macedonians. Now he is calling upon them to keep him from being humiliated.

3. <sup>5</sup> So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction [something that is given grudgingly]. // When we understand the following, then we can rightly and gladly give:
  - a. God is the owner, we are the managers!
  - b. No matter what we give away, God will provide whatever we need!
  - c. Our giving expresses our trust in God!
  - d. Our giving shows love for our neighbor!

#### The Cheerful Giver: 9:6-16

4. <sup>6</sup> The point is this: whoever sows [gives] sparingly will also reap [receive] sparingly, and whoever sows [gives] bountifully will also reap [receive] bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly [grudgingly] or under compulsion [obligation], for God loves a cheerful [happy (willing)] giver.
  - a. What kind of a giver are you?
    - i. Happy – because God has given you something to give!
    - ii. Sad – because, once you give, you think you will have less for yourself!
  - b. Do you hope to give a little, but receive a lot? Y N
  - c. Do you give generously, thankful for what you have and confident that God will provide whatever you need? Y N
5. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you [that is, provide a great amount to you], so that having all sufficiency [enough to live on] in all things at all times, you may abound [be rich] in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." // In Jesus, it is always more and never less.

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 9:10 – 10:18

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### The Cheerful Giver: 9:6-16 – Continued

6. <sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.
- God puts seed into a farmer's hand – *so he can sow* and bread into a person's mouth – *so he can eat!*
  - In a similar way, to those who give generously, *God enriches them so they can give even more!*
  - Think about the flow of the blessings – from God, and then back to God:
    - God enriches a believer...
    - That believer gives to saints in need...
    - Those saints give thanks God!
7. <sup>13</sup> By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, <sup>14</sup> while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. <sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! // Paul pictures the Jewish Christians in Judea rejoicing over God's action to reconcile Jew and Gentile in Christ. They glorify God for relieving their needs through the generosity of the Corinthians (and other Gentile believers) and for this expression of fellowship in the worldwide Church.

### Paul Defends His Ministry: 10:1-18

**A summary of chapters 10-13:** A dark cloud now descends on 2 Corinthians. Some bad news from

Corinth likely arrived as Paul was dictating the Letter (contradicting Titus's joyful report, 7:6–7). Intruders have [worsened] tensions within the Church. These outsiders called Paul's credentials into question, [doubted] his motives, and undermined his ministry among his own converts. Paul wants all glory to go to Christ... But the intruders blow their own trumpets (and obscure Christ from view in the process) and cast [hateful accusations] on Paul's person. Paul must set the record straight by "boasting" about his office (10:8) [as an apostle and being authorized by Jesus]. Boasting of this kind diminishes the intruders and actually gives all glory to Christ!

- <sup>10</sup> I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—<sup>2</sup> I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. // Paul's meekness was *strength under control*, but those who opposed Paul saw it as weakness. To such people, *Paul planned to be bold rather than meek among them!*
- <sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh [*because we are physically alive*], we are not waging war according to the flesh [*with physical weapons like fists, knives, or guns*]. <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power [*like God's Word, the Sacraments, and prayer*] to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ [*we have no ability of ourselves to do such things; however, as we share God's Word, the Spirit is at work to do such things*], <sup>6</sup> being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. // Once Paul is sure of the Corinthians' obedience to Christ, he will go

after the third party described in chs 10–12, the troublemakers.

3. <sup>7</sup> Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. // When we and others are in Christ, then we have so much in common: We are forgiven in Christ, members of God's kingdom, forever blest, and so much more!
4. <sup>8</sup> For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. // It was not Paul's idea to work with the Corinthians; instead, he was called, authorized by Christ Himself for their benefit.
5. <sup>9</sup> I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. <sup>10</sup> For they [that is, my opponents] say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." // Paul may not have looked impressive nor been a great public speaker; however, his words were powerful because they came from God the Father through the Holy Spirit.
6. <sup>11</sup> Let such a person [who opposes us] understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present [in other words, we are not acting nor are not lying, our words will be followed by actions]. <sup>12</sup> Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding. // The intruders no longer stand in "fear and trembling" (7:15) but turn church leadership into a beauty contest judged by worldly standards.
7. <sup>13</sup> But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. <sup>14</sup> For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. <sup>15</sup> We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is

that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, <sup>16</sup> so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.

- a. *area of influence God assigned.* The ascended Christ willed Paul to found the churches in the regions of Achaia and Macedonia (Ac 16:9–10). God gave him authority over these congregations (cf Ac 15:7, 36; 1Co 3:5–9; 4:1).
  - b. *reach even to you.* A forceful reminder that the Corinthians did not become Christians by their own reason or strength, but that the Lord in His mercy reached them precisely through Paul (cf Jn 15:16).
8. <sup>17</sup> "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." <sup>18</sup> For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends. // Of ourselves, we are lost sinners, who are spiritually dead and deserve eternal punishment. Those things are nothing to boast about. Therefore, all proper boasting is in ♦who the Lord is, ♦how much He loves us, ♦what He has done, and ♦what He is continuing to do to bless us now and forevermore!
9. **Chapter 10 Summary:**
- a. Paul's opponents cut him to ribbons and paint themselves in glowing colors, but he presses forward in spiritual warfare, winning souls for Christ against all odds, rejoicing that the Lord prospers his work and opens doors for his ministry, giving all glory to Christ.
  - b. Dear Christian, do not judge your ministers by the standards of secular business and entertainment, but go by whether they speak with the Shepherd's voice and give His care. As Christ endured the darts of the evil one to rescue the undeserving from his clutches, so Paul and faithful ministers submit to affliction in order to reach the lost and build up the flock.

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 11:1-33

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### Paul and the False Apostles: 11:1-15

1. **11** I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! <sup>2</sup> For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ [in other words, the Spirit worked through me to arrange the marriage between you and the Christ]. <sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.
  - a. There is in fact only ONE Jesus, ONE Spirit, and ONE Gospel, yet the Corinthians in Paul's time and many in our time are sometimes easily led astray when false things are applied to Jesus, the Spirit, and the Gospel.
  - b. How can we determine what is true and what is false? \_\_\_\_\_
2. <sup>5</sup> Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles [that is, the false apostles who were trying to deceive the Corinthians]. <sup>6</sup> Even if I am unskilled in speaking [implying that the false ones may have been better public speakers], I am not [unskilled] in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.
3. <sup>7</sup> Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? [Did they presume that Paul's message was insignificant or untrue, since he did not receive compensation for his work?] <sup>8</sup> I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you [THEY paid, but YOU were served]. <sup>9</sup> And

when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need [you should have supplied my needs, but others did so instead]. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way [I did not ask you to help me in the past, nor will I ask in the future]. <sup>10</sup> As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. <sup>11</sup> And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! // Paul loved and deeply cared about the Corinthians, so he boasted in order that they would believe him and benefit eternally.



4. <sup>12</sup> And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. <sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. // In this life, wrong ones can seem right and right ones can seem wrong; therefore, with everything we read or hear, let us NOT believe until we have verified it to be true (Acts 17:11).

## Paul's Sufferings as an Apostle: 11:16-33

5. <sup>16</sup> I repeat, let no one think me foolish. *[A fool is a pathetic figure treading the way of death, which was not true of Paul.]* But even if you do *[think of me as a fool]*, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. <sup>17</sup> What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool *[...an acknowledgment that no genuine servant of Christ speaks this way except under extraordinary conditions.]*. <sup>18</sup> Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. // Again, this is unusual and extraordinary, but it is meant for the eternal good of the Corinthians.
  6. **Sarcasm.** The Corinthians have let themselves be duped *[tricked, deceived]*. <sup>19</sup> For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! <sup>20</sup> For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you *[taking away your freedom in Christ]*, or devours you *[taking wrongful advantage of your hospitality]*, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs *[elevating themselves over you]*, or strikes you in the face *[by hurting you rather than helping you]*. <sup>21</sup> To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! // Paul was being sarcastic; he could have done the same to their harm, but, instead, he acted as he did for their good.
  7. But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that.
    - a. <sup>22</sup> Are they *[the false apostles, who are deceiving you]* Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. // Each statement connected Paul to God's chosen people!
    - b. <sup>23</sup> Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. // Paul gave his all to serve and greatly suffered for it!
    - c. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one *[a very severe punishment; Deut. 25:1-3]*.
  - d. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods *[a very severe punishment]*. Once I was stoned *[and considered dead]*. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; // So difficult to live in such danger, yet Paul endured it because of his love for Jesus and the people!
  - e. <sup>27</sup> in toil *[labor]* and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. // Church planting was not a 9-to-5 job with benefits, but constant labor to the point of exhaustion.
  - f. <sup>28</sup> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches *[concerned that the believers will be deceived and fall away]*. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant *[righteously angry; Eph. 4:26-27]*?
8. <sup>30</sup> If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness *[in other words, think about the many ways in which I suffered; those things make me appear weak]*. <sup>31</sup> The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. // This oath formula guarantees the truthfulness of the whole unlikely catalog from v 23 through 12:10.
  9. <sup>32</sup> At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, <sup>33</sup> but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands. // That reference by Paul indicates that the governor was in league with the Jews of Damascus.

## New Testament Letter: 2 Corinthians 12:1 – 13:14

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### Paul's Visions and His Thorn: 12:1-10

1. **12** I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. <sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ [*aka Paul*] who fourteen years ago was caught up to the **third heaven**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. <sup>3</sup> And I know that this man was caught up into **paradise**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— <sup>4</sup> and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. // *in the body or out of the body*. His spiritual faculties were alert, but Paul's total focus on the Lord and complete forgetfulness of self made him unaware of how his body related to this experience. He may have had the experience as a vision, or he may have been physically taken to heaven.
2. <sup>5</sup> On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses [*because God did everything, and I did nothing*]— <sup>6</sup> though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. <sup>7</sup> So to keep me from becoming conceited [*exalting myself*] because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations [*the great things God uncovered, disclosed, revealed to me by God*], a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger [*an angel*] of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. // As a thorn stuck in our flesh is painful and keeps reminding us that it is there, so Paul's thorn – whatever it was, we don't know – was given to keep him humble, which was not easy, since God had revealed SUCH GREAT THINGS to him!
3. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you [*in other words, I won't take it away, but I will enable you to endure it*], for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- a. It's difficult to be content with such things, "weaknesses, insults..." However, *Paul had a proper understanding of such things*; for example:
  - i. When I am weak, *I trust more in God's strength!*
  - ii. When I am insulted by others, *I rejoice more in God's kind words to me!*
  - iii. When I am being persecuted as a Christian, *I am more certain of my saving relationship with Jesus!*
- b. "...when I am weak, then I am strong." What does that mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Concern for the Corinthian Church: 12:11-21

4. <sup>11</sup> I have been a fool [*I admit it!*]! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. [These are some reasons why:] For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles [*I am a true apostle, called by Jesus*], even though [of myself] I am nothing. <sup>12</sup> The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works [*God worked in conjunction with Paul's ministry to bring some in Corinth to Christ; God also did miracles through Paul*]. <sup>13</sup> For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you [*by asking you to supply my needs, as was my right*]? Forgive me this wrong!
5. <sup>14</sup> Here for the third time I am ready to come to you [*first – an 18-month stay when the church was founded; second – the painful visit mentioned in 2:1*]. And I will not be a burden, for **I seek not what is yours but you** [*that's the right attitude*]. For

children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children [and Paul was the parent].<sup>15</sup> I will most gladly spend [what I possess] and be spent [that is, complete give of myself] for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? [No!]

6. <sup>16</sup> But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. <sup>17</sup> Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? <sup>18</sup> I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? // Some Corinthians suspected Paul's refusal to accept maintenance was a smoke screen to cover up pilfering from the Judean relief funds.
7. <sup>19</sup> Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ [God knows all things, and to him all must give account], and all for your upbuilding, beloved. <sup>20</sup> For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. <sup>21</sup> I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced. // Paul wanted the Spirit to work through his letter, so that his return to Corinth would be joyful.

#### Final Warnings: 13:1-10

1. **13** This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses [a disciplinary procedure... based on Dt 19:15]. <sup>2</sup> I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them [I will excommunicate the unrepentant]— <sup>3</sup> since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. <sup>4</sup> For he was crucified in weakness [appearing weak], but lives by the power of God [who raised Him]. For we

also are weak in him [appearing weak], but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God [(1) "this life [in Christ] will be manifested in the exercise of our spiritual power towards you and for your good" (Ellicott's Commentary), (2) "through the powerful sanctions [penalties]... He will confirm our exercise of Apostolic discipline at Corinth" (Expositor's Greek)].

2. <sup>5</sup> Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!
  - a. They are to examine their consciences to determine profession of apostolic doctrine and involvement in continual repentance....
  - b. 1Co 6:9–10. "The [justifying] faith... exists in repentance... neither does it dwell with mortal [grave] sin" (Ap V 21, 23).
3. <sup>6</sup> I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test [as noted above]. <sup>7</sup> But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test [by living without sin], but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. <sup>8</sup> For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. <sup>9</sup> For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for [that is, we are more concerned about you than us]. <sup>10</sup> For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

#### Final Greetings: 13:11-14

4. <sup>11</sup> Finally, brothers, rejoice [since you are forgiven through Jesus]. Aim for restoration [with others], comfort one another, agree with one another [on the basis of the Scriptures], live in peace [which will result from the other things mentioned above]; and the God of love and peace will be with you. <sup>12</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss [like today's handshake, expressing true fellowship]. <sup>13</sup> All the saints [the ones seen as holy in Christ] greet you.
5. <sup>14</sup> The grace [favor] of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love [affection] of God and the fellowship [close relationship] of the Holy Spirit be with you all.