

2 CORINTHIANS



BY FAITH NOT BY SIGHT

STUDY GUIDE

CITADEL  SQUARE

We know
home in the body,
from the Lord, for we
faith, not by sight,
are of good courage,
we would rather be away
the body and at home
the Lord. So whether
at home or away, we
our aim to please him,
we must all appear before
the seat of Christ,
and one may

2 CORINTHIANS

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Author and Title

The undisputed author of 2 Corinthians is the apostle Paul. 2 Corinthians is most likely the 4th letter that Paul sent to the church of Corinth.¹ Paul was a prominent leader in the early church and wrote the majority of the epistles within the New Testament. He was a Jew and a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38; 22:25-29; 23:27). Prior to his conversion, he led an aggressive wave of persecution on Christians (Acts 8:3). Following his conversion, Paul was uniquely called to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:1-7) and began planting churches throughout the known world.²

Genre and Date

2 Corinthians is considered to be an epistle, or a letter. It was written in AD 55 during Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey.³

Timeline of Paul's Interaction with the Corinthians⁴

The Corinthian Church Established - AD 50 - AD 52

Paul, along with Titus and Silas, established the church in Corinth during his first visit in early AD 50 (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19). Following his visit, Paul traveled to Ephesus, and while there Paul received news about the state of the church in Corinth and wrote to them "not to associate with sexually immoral people." (1 Cor. 5:9)

The Writing of 1 Corinthians - AD 53 - AD 54

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians while in Ephesus and sent the letter to the church by ship (1 Cor. 16:17). He planned to make a visit to the Corinthians with the purpose of taking up a collection for the believers in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4). However, before he sent 1 Corinthians by ship, Paul sent Timothy to Corinth with the anticipation that the letter would reach them first (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11).

The Painful Visit and the Painful Letter - Late AD 54

When Timothy arrived in Corinth, things were not going well in the church. They dismissed Paul's instructions, continued in sexual immorality and divisiveness (2 Cor. 12:21), and false teachers were gaining a foothold in the church (2 Cor. 10:2, 12; 11:19-21). Timothy reported his findings back to Paul, and Paul immediately left for Corinth for a crisis visit (2 Cor. 2:1-2). Paul's visit in Corinth was deeply painful

and humiliating (2 Cor. 2:1-4; 12:21; 13:2). Shortly after returning to Ephesus, Paul sends Titus back to Corinth with the painful letter mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4.

The Writing of 2 Corinthians - AD 55

Titus meets up with Paul as he is traveling to Macedonia and reports to Paul that the Corinthians responded well to his painful letter (2 Cor. 7:7-13). In response, Paul writes 2 Corinthians and sends it to Corinth with Titus (2 Cor. 8:16-24).

The City of Corinth

Corinth was one of the most influential cities within the Roman Empire. Corinth was situated on an isthmus which allowed it to have a port on each side. As a result, Corinth became the center of trade and commerce for the empire. People would have been able to purchase any good imaginable.⁵ As the trade capital of the world, the city became known for materialism, entertainment, and its “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality.⁶

Corinth's Values vs. Paul's Values⁷

Many of the problems within the Corinthian church could be traced to their unconscious acceptance of the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the society in which they lived. The adoption of these values put the church at odds with the values of Paul and Christianity. For instance, one of the highest values within the Greco-Roman world was the attainment of personal “glory” and “honor,” as well as the corresponding avoidance of “shame.” As a result, citizens of Corinth would often engage in forms of self-promotion and boasting in order to elevate their status within a society. In contrast, Paul would always place emphasis on his own weakness as a medium to display God's power (2 Cor. 1:8; 4:7; 6:7; 8:3; 12:9; 13:4). In addition, one was able to increase his status within society by becoming skilled in rhetoric, which was why Paul's attackers attempted to shame him by accusing him of having poor public speaking skills (2 Cor. 10:10). Other factors that increased an individual's status were occupation, wealth, education, moral integrity and ethnic identity. These values were at clear odds with the ministry of Paul as he chose an occupation involving manual labor (2 Cor. 11:7-9), denied income that would be provided to a patron (2 Cor. 11:7), and downplayed his own education (2 Cor. 11:6). In short, the apostle's humility, his servant nature, his rejection of status, his rejection of financial gain, and his refusal to advance his status by use of rhetorical skills all stood in violation to key leadership values embedded in the Corinthian culture.

The Message of 2 Corinthians

In chapters 2-7, Paul is concerned with defending his apostolic ministry and does so by situating it within the new realities of the new covenant. Then in chapters 8-9, Paul instructs the repentant within Corinth and urges them to follow through with their commitment to collect money for the Jerusalem church. And lastly in chapters 10-13, Paul moves his focus to the unrepentant within the church.⁸ To them he defends his apostleship and its perceived weakness while also levying his own attacks upon them and their false teaching. All of this works towards Paul's main point: the way of Christian ministry is not the way of the world. What the world perceives as weakness is actually strength. What the world perceives as foolish is actually wise.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-7

PASSAGE

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In verse 3, Paul calls to mind the character of God as being the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. Why is it important to meditate on the character of God in times of suffering and hardship?
2. Have you experienced more depth and growth in your spiritual life during seasons of hardship or seasons of relative ease? Why?
3. In verse 4, Paul argues that one reason for our afflictions is so we can experience God's comfort and then be a conduit of his comfort to others who are afflicted. What are some specific ways we can comfort and encourage those around us who are in the midst of affliction, suffering or hardship?
4. How would you counsel someone who believes that their suffering and hardships are a sign of God's punishment or displeasure?



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2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-11

PASSAGE

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. 11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul was very open and transparent about his afflictions in verse 8. Is it easy or difficult for you to share your burdens and afflictions with your brothers and sisters in Christ? Why or Why not? What is the value in doing so?
2. When was a time in your life that you felt “utterly burdened beyond your strength”? How did you experience God’s comfort and/or the comfort of others during that time?
3. How do our afflictions and hardships force us to rely on God and not ourselves?
4. What is the greatest “help” we can provide for others when they are suffering (see verse 11)? Why is this often neglected?



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2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-22

PASSAGE

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Paul defending about himself in this section (v.12-14)? Share a time when your conduct or integrity was misunderstood.
2. How did Paul’s opponents try to use his change of plans to attack his character? What are some subtle ways you question the character of others?
3. Why is it critical for messengers of the gospel to be deemed trustworthy (v.18-22)?
4. How does Paul use “boasting” in this section? What do you want to be found boasting in when Jesus returns?



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2 CORINTHIANS 1:23-2:11

PASSAGE

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

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there a broken relationship in your life that you are grieving over? How does Paul's response to the Corinthian church inform our response to those who have deeply hurt us?
2. How do you typically respond to conflict in your life? Do you attack or do you retreat? Why do you think this is?
3. The church in Corinth found it difficult to forgive and accept a repentant sinner. When have you experienced this struggle before in your life?
4. In this passage we see that obedience to Christ includes forgiving others. What does the gospel teach us about forgiveness, and how does it empower us to forgive? How might Satan use unforgiveness in the church to breed division and strife?



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2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-17

PASSAGE

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

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about the seemingly insignificant places you find yourself day to day. How could you see God positioning you and using you as the aroma of Christ in those places among believers and nonbelievers?
2. Look at verses 16-17. Is your default to feel sufficient or insufficient in being the fragrance of Christ in your sphere of influence? How do you deal with that default response?
3. If you could remember that you have been "commissioned by God," how would that change the way you approach your day or go about your daily routine?
4. Paul ends this passage with, "In the sight of God we speak in Christ." What could you say to the people around you this week in order to spread the fragrance of Christ?



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2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-6

PASSAGE

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A handful of individuals invest deeply into our lives. Who could your life be a recommendation letter for and why?
2. In verse 3, Paul is comparing the Old Testament emphasis of the external (law keeping) with the New Testament emphasis of the internal (heart). What are the dangers of evaluating someone based only on their external credentials? Why is it easier to evaluate ourselves by our credentials instead of our hearts?
3. What is the source of Paul's sufficiency? Think about your skill and proficiency. How do you need to reorient how you think about your sufficiency?
4. What do you think it means that "the letter kills but the Spirit gives life"? How can we cultivate a daily dependence on the Spirit?



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2 CORINTHIANS 3:7-18

PASSAGE

7 Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? 9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. 10 Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. 11 For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

12 Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, 13 not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. 14 But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. 15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. 16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To you personally, what makes Christ glorious? How would you describe the surpassing glory of Christ to someone living under the old covenant?
2. In verse 12, Paul concludes that the new covenant ministry gives him hope. Would you say that your life is characterized by hope? Why or why not?
3. In verses 12-18, Paul concludes that his ministry brings boldness, unveiling, freedom, and transformation. How have you experienced one or two of these in your own walk with Christ? Which one are you in the greatest need of currently?
4. How should this passage inform our own personal evangelism and discipleship?



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2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-6

PASSAGE

1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the areas of your life where you have feelings or temptations to "lose heart?" (v.1) How can your community help you in this area?
2. Paul's opponents were using God's Word inappropriately for their own personal gain. How do we see this happening today? How are we prone to tamper with God's Word to make it say what we personally want it to say?
3. Compare and contrast the Corinthian culture to the culture we live in today. What are some of the strategies that the "god of this world" used to blind the Corinthians to the gospel? What about our culture today?
4. Based on verses 4-5, how should we pray for unbelievers? Who are 2-3 people you can begin praying for in this way?



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2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-18

PASSAGE

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.

13 Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, 14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. 15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you see the gospel we carry as a treasure? When is it easy to forget about its beauty in day-to-day life?
2. Paul mentions afflictions and persecutions in verses 8-9. Share a time when you faced similar hardships as Paul. How does the truth of the gospel help us persevere in such difficulties?
3. In verse 13, Paul references the faith of people in the Old Testament and connects our faith with theirs. How does seeing the faith in other people increase thanksgiving in your heart?
4. What things in your life remind you of the glory that is to come in eternity?



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2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10

PASSAGE

1 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever said or thought, “I want to go to heaven, just not yet”? What are you currently experiencing that makes you long for heaven?
2. How does the promised gift of the Holy Spirit help us in our everyday groanings?
3. Does verse 10 teach salvation by works? Does this verse make you uncomfortable? Why or why not? (See Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 3:10-15)
4. Look back to verse 7. What does it mean to walk by faith, not by sight? How can you walk this week despite what you see?



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2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21

PASSAGE

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider how you interact with those around you (coworkers, peers, etc). What is most challenging for you to live with Christian conviction and integrity in those spaces?
2. Christ's death and resurrection empowers us to live new lives, free from the bondage of sin. Reflect back on your conversion and spiritual growth. How have you most seen the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in your life over the years?
3. This passage highlights the great lengths to which God has demonstrated his love for you, but it is often easy to forget this simple yet profound truth. In what ways are you most tempted to forget this truth?
4. One of the greatest privileges we have as ambassadors for Christ is sharing in the ministry of reconciliation. Make a list of 3-5 people in your sphere of influence that don't know Christ. What is one action step you could take with one of these people this week? Take the time to pray for those on your list.



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2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-10

PASSAGE

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

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul urges the Corinthians to not receive the grace of God in vain because today is the day of salvation. Last week we made a list of people in our lives who we need to urge to consider the gospel. How did you take a step towards one of those people in the last week?
2. Share about a time when you knew the truth in your head but didn’t want to embrace it fully with your heart? What obstacles were in the way of you embracing the truth?
3. What causes people to put off being reconciled to God? What are the biggest stumbling blocks or barriers that you see today that hurt the advancement of the gospel?
4. Think of a Christian in your life who experienced deep suffering and difficulty. How did his or her endurance in that season remind you of the truth of the gospel?



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2 CORINTHIANS 6:11-7:1

PASSAGE

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

14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

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

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

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul is desperately trying to help the people of Corinth pursue righteousness from God. How receptive are you to correction and discipline? Who do you have around you to help point out sin in your life?
2. The response of the Corinthians was to say that Paul was trying to restrict them from their desires. What are the ways we come to our own defense when sin is exposed by ourselves or others?
3. Paul previously urged us to be ambassadors of the gospel (5:20), but here seems to urge us to be “separate from them” (6:17). How do we reconcile these two truths? What does it mean to be in the world yet not of the world?
4. Paul’s final exhortation in verse 7:1 is for us to “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit.” How do we pursue holiness in our daily lives?



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2 CORINTHIANS 7:2-16

PASSAGE

2 Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. 4 I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.

5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. 8 For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. 11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. 12 So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. 13 Therefore we are comforted.

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are relationships so messy? How can we emulate Paul and the Corinthians when we have conflicts with brothers and sisters in Christ, particularly in our church?
2. Paul instructs the Corinthians to “make room” for him in their hearts. What are some ways that you can make room for others in your life? Is this something you naturally do, or do you have to work at making room?
3. Verse 6 says that God comforts the downcast. How does God comfort Paul? How can you be a comfort to others when they are downcast?
4. What is the difference between “Godly grief” and “worldly grief”? How do we know if our repentance is genuine?



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2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-9

PASSAGE

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

8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you typically interact with money? (Are you naturally a saver, spender, giver or investor?)
2. How does the example of the Macedonians reveal their devotion to the Lord and their motive for giving?
3. Why is it important that our love toward one another has no strings attached?
4. How does verse 9 shape the way you view your life and your money?



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2 CORINTHIANS 8:10-15

PASSAGE

10 And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. 11 So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. 12 For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. 15 As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack." (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When a mentor gives you advice, how do you receive it?
2. Do you struggle more to be ready to see new opportunities or to complete tasks you have already begun? How has God used others to encourage and support you in the area where you may be weaker?
3. How do the principles from this passage guide you toward a proper motivation for giving?
4. In verse 15, Paul calls for his readers to remember God's provision of manna to Israel. How does this shape the way you view your material possessions? How does it make you think about the goodness of God in Christ?



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2 CORINTHIANS 8:16-9:5

PASSAGE

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

9:1 Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. 3 But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. 4 Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul commends one of the brothers for his “gospel fame,” yet the brother remains nameless. Does this change the way you think of fame and how you ought to live your life?
2. Is it possible to trust yourself and your own integrity too much? What might happen if you do?
3. How have you seen one person's generosity result in more people being generous and sacrificial? What does this teach us about community and how our own faithfulness affects those around us?
4. Is this statement true: “How you use your money is a marker of if you have received the grace of God.” Why or why not?



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2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15

PASSAGE

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

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

10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does God bless us financially? According to this passage, what should be our response when He does? If we have little, how can we still display generosity?
2. How should we respond when others give to us cheerfully? Share a time when you were a recipient of someone’s generosity. How did you respond?
3. What fears do you have that make it hard for you to be generous with what God has given you?
4. What is God’s “inexpressible gift”? (v.15) How does this inexpressible gift motivate us to be cheerful givers?



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2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-12

PASSAGE

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

7 Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. 8 For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. 9 I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. 10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." 11 Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. 12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul begins by appealing to the "meekness and gentleness of Christ." Do you naturally view meekness and gentleness as strengths? Why or why not? What are some ways you can grow in gentleness and humility?
2. The rebellious minority that Paul is addressing in this passage questions his authority. How does our culture generally view authority? How can you grow in your respect of authority, particularly spiritually?
3. Paul says the Christian life is "war." What are we warring against, and what are our weapons? How can we encourage each other to trust in the Spirit to fight our battles?
4. Why do we often compare ourselves to others around us? How can this be unhealthy in the Christian life?



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2 CORINTHIANS 10:13-18

PASSAGE

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe an incident where someone else took credit for your work. How did that make you feel?
2. What are the areas of influence that God has given you? What are the areas of influence that God has given our church?
3. What are signs of improper boasting? How does being approved by God free you from the need to boast in your own work?
4. How can boasting in the Lord help you live in relational harmony with others?



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2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-15

PASSAGE

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

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

12 And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Try to put yourself in Paul's shoes. How would it make you feel to watch someone you love be deceived by untruth?
2. Satan's tactic from the beginning was to deceive by attacking God's character and God's message. How can we actively fight against Satan's attempts to deceive us?
3. What was the motivation of the false teachers in this passage? How do you see these motivations at work today?
4. Do you know anyone whose life is based on a false view of God or a false gospel? What aspects of Paul's example could you put into action in your interactions with them?



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2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-30

PASSAGE

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

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is Paul's use of irony and even sarcasm something we should emulate? When might it be appropriate, and when is it inappropriate?¹
2. We tend to assume that more obedience to Christ will result in less suffering, but Paul's life and ministry displays the opposite. Why are we tempted to forget that God allows suffering in order to increase our sanctification?
3. How would you describe the differences between the Corinthians' view of the Christian life and Paul's view?
4. How does Paul's example of humility and empathy inform the way I serve in my church, my family and my community?



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2 CORINTHIANS 11:30-12:10

PASSAGE

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul prayed several times for his “thorn” to be removed, yet it remained. How are we tempted to view God when our prayers don’t get answered in the way that we would like?
2. Have you ever had a “thorn in the flesh”? What did God teach you in that season?
3. If Christ’s power is made perfect in our weakness, why is it often difficult to share hard things with one another? Despite this, why is it worth it and important to do so?
4. Paul learned to be content in his hardships and difficulties. What are the ramifications of living a life of discontentment?



2 CORINTHIANS 12:11-21

PASSAGE

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

14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? 16 But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. 17 Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? 18 I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. 20 For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. 21 I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is someone that has invested deeply into your spiritual life? Did you take them for granted? What would it look like for you to “commend” them or honor them?
2. Why is it encouraging to see Paul’s perseverance with the Corinthians? How can we persevere with others regardless of their response?
3. Why does Paul feel “spent” in his relationship with the Corinthians? Have you ever felt this way in your leadership of others?
4. What does it look like to love and persevere with someone who is unrepentant? How does God’s faithfulness in our life help us approach those situations with patience?



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2 CORINTHIANS 13:1-14

PASSAGE

1 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 2 I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— 3 since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 4 For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! 6 I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. 7 But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. 8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. 10 For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

11 Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints greet you.

14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Paul's ministry reflect the ministry of Jesus?
2. What does it look like to test the genuineness of your faith? What should you look for, and who should you include in the process?
3. How does this passage instruct us on how we ought to pray for our critics? How is the way of Jesus and Paul different from the way of the world in regards to how they treat their enemies and critics?
4. What would our church look like if every member did the hard work of being unified in Christ? What impact would this have on you and in our city?
5. How did this series through 2 Corinthians impact you personally?



NOTES

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REFERENCES



INTRODUCTION (p 3)

¹*ESV Study Bible*

²Gary Burge, Lynn Cohick and Gene Green, *New Testament Antiquity*

³George Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*

⁴George Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*

⁵George Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*

⁶Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*

⁷George Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*

⁸Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*

2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-30 (p 48)

¹The Navigators, *2 Corinthians—LifeChange: A NavPress Bible Study Series*

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