

# 2 Corinthians

Quiet Time Series, Oct–Nov 2013

*Thanks be to God,  
who always leads us in triumph in Christ*



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## How to use this series

The aim of this booklet is to help you to read, understand and apply the Bible to your life, via a series of short daily studies on 2 Corinthians. For each section of scripture, we provide a mixture of notes and/or questions to help you get started, more detailed points for delving deeper into the text when you have time, suggestions for applying the text, and prayer recommendations. We have prepared studies for each week day, leaving weekends free for other study or catching up. The dates are a suggestion; feel free to read at your own pace.

At the beginning of the booklet is some background material on 2 Corinthians, answering basic questions such as: Who wrote it? To whom was it written? Where and when was it written? What were the religious, political, economic, cultural and geographical circumstances at the time? There is also a timeline at the end of the background section, so that you can see how the different events described in the Bible fit together with each other and with other historical events. Since the historical data is limited, there are inevitably differences of opinion on some of the details, as you will no doubt discover if you do any further reading. For those who want to read further, there is a reference list at the end of the booklet, listing the commentaries and books which we used in preparing the series. Some are easily readable, others make you work hard to understand their insights – we give our opinions of the books to help you avoid choosing the wrong type of book for your interests.

For each day's reading, we recommend that you read the Bible passage first — it is God's word, this booklet is not! — and write down any thoughts and questions you may have. Then look at the questions and notes for the passage. Do not rush the material just to be “up to date” with the reading schedule. When you have time look up the references given and reflect on these; wrestle through the difficult passages and perhaps check more than one Bible translation. Try to look for central themes in each section and over the whole letter.

Any questions that are not answered here can be raised at the end of the lessons each Friday, or with one of the teaching ministry (Andy, Clare, Randal, Simon, Steve, Tony, Tuka and Ugo) personally. You are also welcome to send any comments, criticisms and questions at any time by email to [EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com](mailto:EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com).

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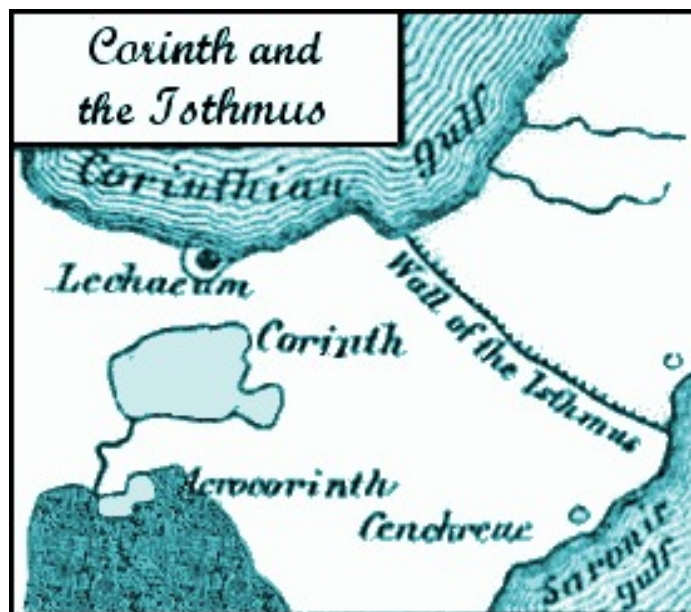


Figure 1: Map of Corinth and the Isthmus

## Background to 2 Corinthians

Welcome to the bustling commercial city of Ancient Corinth. With the exception of technology and language, Corinth would not have been very different to some of our vibrant modern cities in the Western world. Certainly, this port city had a centuries-long history as a prosperous trading centre, being situated at the foot of the Isthmus land bridge within a couple of miles of two major harbours east and west of the city (see Figure 1). The seaports brought a huge advantage for Corinth, as seafaring business poured in from the East (e.g. Syria, Egypt) and from the West (e.g. Italy, Spain, Libya).

Corinth shared many similar features with key cities of its day; its commercial significance was on a par with the likes of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch, and its architecture was paralleled by cities like Rome, Philippi and Ephesus (see below). There would have been no shortage of shops or shopping centres (stoa) and marketplaces (agora), as well as open-air theatres and a multiplicity of pagan temples. Many but not all cities in the Roman Empire had at least one Jewish synagogue, depending on the presence and size of the local Jewish community; Corinth was lucky to have a synagogue. Cities like Athens even had an “Odeum” (literally, “singing place”) used for the performing arts.

In order to understand the original purpose of any New Testament letter to a church in a city, we need to appreciate some of its historical, cultural, political and demographic background. In addition to this introduction, please see also the historical timeline showing key events (reconstructed according to scriptural evidence, archaeology, and other historical sources). This can be used alongside the quiet time notes or simply for reference.

### Geography

Ancient Corinth was situated at the foot of the Isthmus land bridge which was just 4 miles in width. This Isthmus (see Figures 1 and 2) connected the Peloponnesian peninsula (in which Corinth was located) to the Greek mainland. The city was 45 miles west of Athens (Paul may have needed a horse; walking would have taken days). Corinth was five times the size of Athens and was then the official provincial capital. The city centre was located on a plain but to the south the “Acrocorinth”, 1800 feet high, towered over it. Ancient Corinth was served by two seaport harbours on the two sides of the Isthmus: Cenchrea (Rom 16:1; Acts 18:18) overlooked the Saronic Gulf in the Aegean Sea, while Lechaemum overlooked the Gulf of Corinth in the Adriatic Sea.

### History

Ancient Corinth, founded in the 10th century BC, thrived for centuries as a city state with self-government. Part of its independent success was attributed to its strategic location. From a military perspective, a fortress was built on Acrocorinth as a focal point for fending off foreign invaders who passed through the Isthmus. This fortress was later converted to the temple of Aphrodite (goddess of love). Tradition tells us that until 146BC, 1000 priestesses of the temple would come down from Acrocorinth in the evening and serve as ritual prostitutes with the men in the city centre. This ritual pagan worship was supposed to ensure prosperity and fertility of the crops, livestock and humans (a bit like some of the Canaanite gods of the Old Testament). In the heart of the city stood the temple of Apollo (a Greek sun god and a god of oracles, also honoured by the Romans). Many commercial or merchant ships traversing between the Aegean Sea of the east and the Adriatic Sea of the west would not risk the dangerous and often fatal 250 mile journey around the Peloponnesian peninsula. The custom was to drag the ships on rollers across the 4 mile isthmus from one gulf to the other. With such regular traffic of ships and boats, Corinth became like a “Holiday Inn” or “Travelodge” on the M25. This brought wealth and trade into the city as sailors and merchants engaged in transient business during their stopover. Up until 146BC, the indigenous population was Greek, with a fair percentage of visiting foreigners and immigrants (e.g. Jews) living there.

As the Roman Republic (509-27BC) was growing in power, Corinth formed the Achaean Alliance with other Greek city states for self-defence. In the battle of Corinth (146BC), the Roman General Lucius Mummius crushed the alliance, and Corinth was sacked and destroyed. No Corinthian inhabitants were left after the battle; all the men were killed and women and children were sold off into slavery all over the Roman world; the few wealthy Greek aristocrats escaped to the island of Delos. Old Corinth lay unoccupied in ruins for 100 years. The temple of Aphrodite was totally destroyed, with no evidence of it having been rebuilt by Paul’s day. The only significant architectural legacy



Figure 2: Map of Ancient Greece

of Old Corinth is the remains of the Apollo Temple (eight columns of which still exist). In 146BC two Roman provinces were established in Greece, Achaia in the south and Macedonia in the north.

By 44BC the Roman dictator Julius Caesar decided to rebuild Corinth, since he admired its strategic location from an economic perspective. It was built as a Roman colony with Roman architecture. Its legislation and political system, including its self-government and pop-culture, was modelled on Rome. Caesar even gave Corinth a political name: “colonia laus iulia corinthiensis” (colony of Corinth, the praise of Julius). Julius conscripted freedmen (former slaves) from various parts of the Roman Empire to emigrate there. The population initially comprised Roman Italians (including some retired Roman soldiers and government officials), Egyptians, Syrians and Jews, and became increasingly cosmopolitan with the return of wealthy Greeks to the city. Many languages would have been spoken there, but the two main ones were Latin and Greek.

### Lifestyle and Culture

Despite Roman colonisation, Corinth continued to host the Isthmian Games every two years. This tradition, dating back to 532BC, was a major spectacle in which Greeks took great pride, as it attracted audiences from around the world including Emperor Nero himself. This sporting event would be the equivalent of the American Super Bowl, Wimbledon or the British FA Cup final in terms of its importance to Corinth, both culturally and as a huge source of revenue. Amongst many other activities the games comprised athletes who ran naked (i.e. with nothing on the body to slow them down) in order to win a perishable wreath (see the metaphors used in 1 Cor 9:24-25; Heb 12:1). There was also an open-air theatre northwest of the city centre used for concerts and debates. Later in history they may have used the complex for gladiatorial shows. Many taverns and brothels were available for sailors and Roman inhabitants in the city. Corinth became such a cesspit of immoral living that a new Greek verb “to corinthianise” developed to describe one who adopts a culture of getting rich quick, drinking to excess and practising sexual immorality. Contrary to belief, this culture was a Roman excess and not a Greek one, and had nothing to do with Aphrodite, whose temple and ritual had been destroyed in 146BC.

In the central marketplace there was a large open square with a chain of shops on the south side. Paul, as one of the traders, would have supported himself through working there along with Priscilla and Aquila as leatherworkers (or tentmakers). In the middle of that chain of shops was a big stone platform called a “bema” or judgement seat (Figure 3). It was here that legal and judicial disputes were decided, with the parties presenting their case before a presiding judge or official.



Figure 3: Judgement Seat (Bema) in Corinth

The bema also served another purpose: winning athletes were rewarded by being crowned with a wreath, standing on this platform. The bema was found in other provincial cities. In Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate presided over Jesus' verdict while sitting on the bema (Matt 27:19; John 19:13). Paul was brought by the Jews before the proconsul Gallio after teaching and preaching in Corinth for 18 months, on a trumped up charge of breaking Roman law by teaching a religion external to both Judaism and the traditional pagan Greco-Roman pantheon (Acts 18:12-14). Gallio rightly dismissed the case as the issue was not a criminal matter. Paul used the imagery of God sitting on a bema (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10).

### **The Church in Corinth**

Paul arrived in Corinth from Athens during his second missionary journey (see Figure 4) around 50AD. There he joined Priscilla and Aquila who were Jewish Christians and deportees from Rome. While there, Paul visited the local synagogue, as was his custom in every city. Timothy and Silas came down from Macedonia to assist Paul in the mission there. His target audience was firstly the Jews since theologically he believed that the gospel was for Jews first and then Gentiles (Rom 1:16; 2:9). Secondly, he targeted Gentile God-fearers. By this time, many Gentiles in the Roman Empire were becoming disillusioned with the ineffectiveness of the Greco-Roman gods to change lives, ethically and morally. These gods were even being ridiculed by their own poets and philosophers. Gentiles started looking for other answers, especially from the East. Oriental religions such as Mithraism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism became popular, and Gentiles particularly admired the exclusivity, monotheistic philosophy and moral lifestyle taught by Judaism. Few Gentiles converted fully to Judaism by painful circumcision, baptism, a sacrifice offering and maintaining food restriction laws; most were happier just to participate in worship at the back of the synagogue.

Paul's gospel of salvation through faith in Christ, with the power to change lives, and requiring no painful conversion rituals, would have been more appealing to these worshippers. Wherever Paul converted sizeable numbers of Gentiles at the synagogue, this triggered Jewish envy and then opposition to his message. This is exactly what happened at the synagogue in Corinth. In disgust Paul went next door to a Roman God-fearer, Titius Justus (perhaps known in the letters as Gaius), who later was converted. Then the prominent synagogue leader, Crispus, was converted along with his whole household, which must have been a tremendous shock to the Jewish community. The Jews replaced Crispus with Sosthenes as their new leader. After Paul had spent 18 months with the church in Corinth, the Jews brought him before Gallio (proconsul over Achaia from July 51AD to June 52AD – see the Delphi Inscription) on the charges mentioned earlier, which were dismissed. It





Figure 4: Second missionary journey of Paul (49-52AD)

was most likely that Sosthenes represented their case; he lost, and was chastised by the people. It is possible that he later resigned his post and became a Christian before visiting or settling in Ephesus (1 Cor 1:1). Another prominent official in Corinth, Erastus (Rom 16:23), might have become a Christian during Paul's stay; Erastus later assisted Paul on the missionary journeys to encourage the Macedonian churches (Acts 19:22). He must have been a Roman in order to be a city treasurer in Corinth; an inscription mentioning Erastus has been found near the site of the theatre, describing his contribution to the paving of the city. After 18 months, Paul left Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla for Ephesus. He only spent a brief time at the synagogue with the promise of returning by God's will. He was in a rush to reach Jerusalem within 30 days to fulfil a Nazirite vow of thanksgiving.

After visiting the Jerusalem church and spending time in Antioch, Paul started his third missionary journey, visiting the Galatian and Phrygian churches before settling in Ephesus. During his stay there, Paul was in regular communication with the church in Corinth, which was struggling to break with the city's culture. Chloe, or members of her household, may have written a letter or visited Ephesus to express concerns to Paul about issues including party factions, carnality, egotism and immaturity in the church (1 Cor 1:11). It is likely that Paul had written an earlier letter of correction which included warning the disciples in Corinth not to associate with immoral people (1 Cor 5:9). This letter, which is now lost, was apparently misinterpreted to mean the church should disconnect completely from the pagan world, while condoning immorality among the church membership. The Corinthian church wrote to Paul asking him to address concerns over marriage, food sacrificed to idols, spiritual gifts, orderly worship, and the contribution (1 Cor 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). This letter would have been delivered by their envoys Fortunatus, Stephanus and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17). Paul took the opportunity to write a letter, known to us as 1 Corinthians, both to address the concerns raised formally and also to challenge the sins reported to exist within the church. This letter was probably delivered by Timothy (1 Cor 4:17); it appears the results were unsatisfactory, and Paul himself then made a brief "painful visit" to Corinth (2 Cor 2:1). It seems the condition of the church continued to worsen, however, with the minds of disciples being poisoned by "false apostles". These were some of the charges and accusations that these false apostles made against Paul:

- He was a fickle leader who changed the gospel like he changed his travel plans
- His apostolic authority was questionable since he had no letters of commendation
- He was not a good speaker much less a good preacher



Figure 5: Third missionary journey of Paul (53-57AD)

- A lack of love for the Corinthian church was the reason for him not allowing Corinth to support him financially, though he was supported by other churches
- An apostle who is not being paid could not be a credible preacher

Paul returned from the unrepentant church to Ephesus, and with much emotional distress he wrote a “severe letter” (2 Cor 2:4 – a letter now lost) which was brought to the church by Titus. Paul then became increasingly anxious both over the church and also because Titus had not returned with any news; after the Ephesian riot, Paul set off for Troas and then the Macedonian province in search of Titus. When Titus arrived in Macedonia with good news about Corinth, Paul was relieved and overjoyed; he saw this as God’s comfort, and took this opportunity to write 2 Corinthians. The letter has three main themes:

- Paul’s joyful thanksgiving over the repentant church
- Paul seeking renewal of their pledge, and preparation for financial giving for the poor in Judea.
- Paul’s defence of his apostleship

The journey made by Titus and two other brothers to deliver this letter also had the purpose of ensuring preparation was made for the promised financial gift. The whole missionary journey before and after Corinth can be traced using the map in Figure 5.

## Summary Timeline of Corinth and Paul the Apostle

- 44BC Corinth rebuilt as a Roman colony
- 34/35AD conversion of Saul/Paul (Acts 9, 22, 26)
- 37/38AD Paul's two week visit to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29; Gal 1:18); Paul sent to Tarsus to escape a Jewish plot
- 42/43AD Paul brought back to Syrian Antioch with Barnabas to build the church; predicted famine imminent; Paul and Barnabas raise funds for Jerusalem church (Acts 11:25-30)
- 44AD Barnabas and Paul return to Antioch with John Mark (Acts 12:25)
- 47-48AD First missionary journey (Acts 13-14) – Cyprus and Asia Minor (modern Turkey)
- 48AD Paul returns to Antioch; Paul writes the letter of Galatians; Paul, Barnabas and Titus (and others) attend the Jerusalem council (Gal 2; Acts 15)
- 49-52AD Second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22); John Mark and Barnabas head for Cyprus; Paul and Silas visit the Galatian churches; Paul meets Timothy; Macedonian vision; first mission trip to Europe
- 50AD Paul stays in some Macedonian cities to preach the gospel (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea); he later arrives in the province of Achaia (Athens, Acts 17; Corinth, Acts 18); the Church is started in Corinth; Delphi Inscription referring to Gallio (July 51-June 52AD)
- 52AD Transient visit to Ephesus en route to Jerusalem; at Jerusalem: Paul's Nazirite vow of thanksgiving; he then returns to Antioch for a while before beginning his third journey
- 53-57AD Third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:16); Paul visits churches in provinces of Phrygia and Galatia in Asia Minor; Paul goes to Ephesus; stays three years building a ministry
- 53-54AD During Paul's stay, concerns of the church in Corinth reach him over the Aegean Sea via: members of Chloe's household (1 Cor 1:11), a letter from the church in Corinth (1 Cor 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1), and reports from Fortunatus, Stephanus and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17)
- 54/55AD Paul writes 1 Corinthians in response, delivered by Timothy; Paul then embarks on a "painful visit" (2 Cor 2:1); the situation worsens, with the Corinth church evidently influenced by false apostles who try to discredit Paul and the gospel; Paul writes a "severe letter" (2 Cor 2:4) from Ephesus, delivered to the church by Titus; riots take place in Ephesus (Acts 19)
- 56AD Paul leaves Ephesus in search of Titus; Paul and Titus meet in Macedonia; Titus shares the good news of Corinth's repentance; Paul writes 2 Corinthians; Paul and co-workers revisit Corinth to collect the poor contribution for the Jerusalem church (Acts 20:1-4)
- 57AD From Corinth or Cenchrea Paul writes Romans before setting off to Jerusalem with the raised funds; Paul is arrested by Jews in Jerusalem and kept in Roman custody
- 58-60AD Paul is transferred to Caesarea and kept in custody by two Roman governors, Antonius Felix (52-59AD) and Porcius Festus (59-62AD)
- 60-62AD Paul is transferred to house arrest in Rome awaiting his appeal to Caesar; Paul writes Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians and later Philippians
- 63-65AD Paul writes to Timothy who is in Ephesus
- 66AD Paul writes to Titus who is in Crete
- 67AD Paul imprisoned in Rome awaiting trial; he writes 2 Timothy; later executed by Emperor Nero

A more detailed timeline is available from the teaching ministry ([EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com](mailto:EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com)) or church website.



## 2 Cor 1:1-11 — God's Comfort in Suffering

Mon 7 Oct

Paul opens his letter with a form of salutation usual in Greek letters of his day. As with most of his letters, Paul introduces himself as an apostle called by the will of God (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1). An apostle literally meant "one sent". The ordinary use of the word would apply to a special envoy or ambassador sent by a king or leading statesman on official business. Here Paul declares that he is appointed by God himself and sent by his authority. Paul addresses the church in this way to show that he and his letter have divine rather than human authority. In the case of Corinth, why do you think this emphasis in his letter would have been particularly important?

As part of Paul's normal greeting he writes "grace and peace" to the church (cf Rom 1:7). This grace represents the unmerited favour of God. Do you feel grace and peace from God today? Why/why not?

In v3, Paul praises God for two particular qualities. First he describes God as the Father of mercies. In the Old Testament, God's compassion and mercy demonstrate His love for His children (Ex 34:6-7; Ps 103:13-14; Mic 7:18-20). This mercy is also shown by Jesus (Matt 5:7). We see this compassion or mercy clearly when there is forgiveness of sin and reconciliation (2 Cor 2:7-10). How do you feel when others show you mercy? When have you seen the mercy of God most clearly in your life?

God is also described as the God of all comfort (in some versions "consolation"). This is the same word in the Greek that is used to describe the Holy Spirit as our Comforter, Helper, Advocate or Paraclete (John 14:26; 15:26). This theme of God's comfort can be seen since the Old Testament (Is 51:3; 61:2; Zech 1:17). Jesus himself reveals the comfort of God for those who mourn over sin and are filled with godly sorrow (Matt 5:4). Note that the word "comfort" in this passage is not being used in the way in which we commonly use it in the 21st century, i.e. being comfortable, soft on ourselves or giving ourselves a treat when life has been challenging. Rather, it was a term used in the ancient world of a defence lawyer who spoke on behalf of his client. God comforts us through encouraging or enabling us to endure and continue to obey His will.

The word "affliction" (v4) is used in the NT to describe the various pressures – physical, economic, social, or emotional – that the saints have to endure in order to live for Christ (Rom 12:12; 1 Thess 3:4; Heb 10:32-33; Mark 4:17; 2 Cor 2:4; Phil 4:14). Suffering for Christ and his gospel is a constant theme in the NT (Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24; 2 Tim 1:8; 1 Pet 4:12-16). Jesus himself predicted afflictions which the saints would endure for a period of time (Matt 24:21; Rev 2:9-10; 7:14). Paul identifies with the church in their suffering. Paul does not necessarily promise that God's comfort removes suffering, but that the more there is suffering for Christ, the more God's comfort is evident. God's comfort is present even when we lack human necessities. Paul himself had needs and weaknesses, but he felt God's comfort as he understood God's grace and power were sufficient for him in his weaknesses (12:7-9). God's comfort strengthened Paul in his weakness, but God did not promise the removal of such weaknesses. If we had no weaknesses or sufferings, would we feel the need for God or His comfort? What about general suffering in the world that is common to man? Does God not care in these situations? How about self-inflicted suffering? What would God be showing us in these situations?

Paul shows in the letter that God has a purpose for His comfort. Paul was to pass on his comfort in the form of encouragement to the church. News of Paul's suffering and comfort was to enable the church to endure spiritually to the end. Although God can comfort in many ways including Scripture, one primary source of comfort is through fellowship (2 Cor 7:5-7). Paul mentioned a particular affliction in Asia for which he gives no details. Some believe it may have been connected with the riot in Ephesus instigated by Demetrius (Acts 19:23-34). Others think it was Paul's encounter fighting wild beasts in the arena (1 Cor 15:32). Still others think that Paul was distressed by a physical ailment. In any case it was beyond his power and ability to help himself. He uses a legal term, "sentence of death", to show how helpless he was. He could not appeal or overturn the verdict in his life. His dependence was on the power of God to rescue him. He also appeals to the church possibly along with other churches to pray for him. How do you feel when you know that others are praying for specific circumstances in your life?

## 2 Cor 1:12-14 — Paul's Sincerity

Tue 8 Oct

Paul uses the word “boast” more in 2 Corinthians than anywhere else in the NT. At first glance one may almost think that Paul is conceited or arrogant. When we look at the context of the whole letter and remember that the letter is like one side of a telephone call or a response to a previous email, Paul is defending himself against his critics who are doing the real boasting. His critics were commending themselves and comparing themselves to each other based on their qualifications, merits and achievements (3:1; 10:12-18). They even boasted of themselves as being of high pedigree and claiming to see revelations (11:22; 12:1-5). In contrast, there are two words which Paul uses to describe his behaviour: the first word could be rendered as “simplicity”, “sincerity” or “generosity”; the second word could also mean “sincerity” or “purity of motive.” Paul’s defence was not to boast of his credentials like the critics but of his sincere character when dealing with the church. Can you think of examples when we could lack purity of motive or sincerity in our Christian lives? How do you feel when others are repeatedly recognised for their Christian achievements or service and you are not?

Paul’s “boast”, which also could be rendered as a “proud confidence” is not claimed by his own human wisdom but by the grace of God. Furthermore, Paul writes here in first person plural (“our” boast), not referring to himself alone. What Paul writes to the church is simple and plain for the church to read and understand/recognise (a play on words in the Greek). They partly understood, probably from the visit Titus made to Corinth. The long-term hope was that the church would be proud of Paul and his co-workers as he was proud of the church. When and what do you think the church partly understood? How do you think this letter helped them to understand fully? Are we able to understand God’s will fully from the scriptures (cf Eph 5:17)?

## 2 Cor 1:15-2:4 — Paul's Change of Travel Plans

Wed 9 Oct

Paul’s critics had taken issue with his change of travel plans, but it seems that this was a pretext to discredit his reliability; he was apparently accused of being a fickle man who changed plans like he changed his message (v18) to suit his own needs. Even before he wrote 1 Corinthians, Paul must have communicated to Corinth an original plan to visit Corinth twice by seeing them first before heading up north to the province of Macedonia and later returning to Corinth (see the maps in the introduction). Corinth would then have had the privilege of sending Paul off to Judea where he would distribute the benevolent aid that he collected from the churches. Later, in Ephesus (approx. 54-56AD), Paul “resolved in the Spirit” to make one single trip to Corinth by passing through Macedonia first, and then to go to Jerusalem from Corinth (Acts 19:21). This is explained more clearly in 1 Cor 16:5-9. Essentially Paul no longer had time for a double trip before winter, because he had needed to stay longer in Ephesus to do ministerial work and to stabilise the church in the face of much opposition.

After Paul sent 1 Corinthians via Timothy the response from Corinth to the letter of correction was negative. Paul had to make a brief but painful visit across the Aegean (not recorded in Acts). It was then that the church under the influence of the false apostles may have criticised his integrity. Paul spent time during that painful visit to warn church members, particularly the unrepentant offenders (13:2). Paul returned to Ephesus with much sorrow for the church because of their lack of repentance. Paul then wrote a painful emotional letter to Corinth which he sent with Titus, probably a letter of correction or discipline which has since been lost. In any case it caused the church sorrow enough to repent. Do you care for others in the church to the point of distress, anguish or tears?

Titus took a long time in returning with a report from Corinth, so Paul was anxious enough to leave a thriving ministry in Ephesus and later Troas (2:12-13) in search of Titus. So when Paul finally met up with Titus in Macedonia with news of the church’s repentance (7:5-11), Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to convey his joy, and also to set straight the charges and accusations made against him. So Paul was not making and changing plans on a personal whim. Just as his word was consistent in Christ, his plans also were spiritually guided. As he does in some of his other letters he swears before God (v23) by calling God as a witness greater than any human witness (cf Rom 9:1; Gal 1:20). With this oath he gives a further reason for the change, and that was to spare Corinth from another painful premature visit; Paul did not want to lord over their faith but to give them time to repent on their own and not by force. Even though situations change, do we trust that God is

unchanging and reliable? Even if a church leader lets us down, and we don't understand why, do we still trust God? If and when you challenge another person's sin in love, how can this be done without lording over their faith and trying to force repentance based on what you say?

Paul seals his defence by reminding the church of when he, Silvanus and Timothy first came to preach the gospel of Christ to them (Acts 18:5-11). The point was that the message of God's promises was consistent and unchanging, in contrast to the message of others who were altering the gospel of Christ (4:2; 11:4) for their own interests. Paul reassures and reminds the church of their relationship with God, shared also by Paul and his co-workers. He uses four terms (three of which were of commercial use) to illustrate the secure relationship that is possible if we hold fast to the gospel in faith. The term rendered as "God established/secured us" is descriptive of when a deal or transaction is made firm with a solid foundation, i.e. a seller's guarantee. The second term "He anoints us" encapsulates an OT theme. This anointing was used of divinely appointed kings, priests and prophets, three offices which are fulfilled in Jesus. When someone was anointed or consecrated, God's Spirit fell on that individual or group (Lev 8-9; 1 Sam 16:13). When teaching in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19), Jesus applied Isaiah 61:1 to himself, stating that the Holy Spirit was upon him since he was anointed by God. In the NT there is a connection between being anointed by God and possessing God's word or indwelling Spirit (cf 1 John 2:20,24-27). The context here suggests that the anointing refers to the Spirit. Why is this so important? Well, if Paul, his co-workers and the church of Corinth are all sanctified by the same Holy Spirit, then Paul cannot be a false disciple. For the church to deny Paul would be for them to deny their own inheritance. The third term "he seals us" is again a commercial term, used to describe a trade or transaction in goods made secure from tampering by use of a wax seal with a stamp of ownership on it, the owner here being God. The final term rendered here as "guarantee" or "pledge" was literally a down payment or deposit until payment was received in full. The same word was used for an engagement ring, where one showed his earnest intentions by giving a deposit, sealing the union by engagement until marriage. The Spirit is such a deposit, given until we fully meet our owner. Do you believe you have the Holy Spirit? Are you confident in God's ownership of you? What can shake this confidence?

## **2 Cor 2:5-11 — Restoration of a Repentant Sinner**

**Thu 10 Oct**

Paul now appeals to the church to show compassion to those who have caused trouble in the church, whether through personal sin or corporately causing others to rebel, but who have now come to repentance. Some conclude that this passage may refer to a specific individual who committed incest, mentioned in 1 Cor 5. However neither this passage nor 7:12, which make mention of one who did wrong, make any specific references to an incestuous man. Furthermore, between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians at least one letter was written by Paul (now lost) and one "painful" visit took place, making it less likely that the incestuous man is the sole contender. Grammatically, Paul opens with an indefinite pronoun, "anyone." Paul may have had in mind one offender or possibly a small minority of offenders who had caused grief in the church but have now repented. It would appear that the church disciplined the offenders among them, but the nature of the "punishment" is not described here, although disfellowship is mentioned in Paul's other letters (1 Cor 5:2-5; Titus 3:10; Rom 16:17; 2 Thess 3:14). What is clear here is that this punishment was not to be permanent. Paul wrote to urge them to reaffirm their love to any disciple who caused offence but was now repentant. The forgiveness described is unmerited favour, similar to God's forgiveness. The consolation or comfort described is the same word used in Chapter one. Is it possible that an offender who is never forgiven by the church, despite his repentance, could revert back to a state of unrepentance? Paul was aware that lack of forgiveness was just as sinful as the offence, and that Satan would use this to destroy the church. What is comparable for us? Lack of grace or forgiveness between parents and kids, unresolved conflict in marriage, two Christians who fall out? How can we learn from this and so not be outwitted by Satan?

## 2 Cor 2:12-17 — The Triumphal Victory

Fri 11 Oct

As mentioned earlier, Paul left a three year ministry in Ephesus and journeyed to Troas. Although he started another thriving ministry in Troas he was extremely concerned about the welfare of Corinth and why Titus had not returned yet with news. It certainly was not the first time he had visited Troas because about six years earlier, Paul had a vision there to go into Macedonia to preach the gospel for the first time (Acts 16:8-11). Perhaps Paul expected to find Titus in Troas because this seaport was his hometown, or maybe he was using the churches en route as a “satnav” to find Titus. Having said farewell to the church in Troas he set sail for Macedonia where he finally found Titus. In fact Paul was in Macedonia for a period of time before Titus arrived from Achaia. Until then Paul was downcast and afflicted in every way, physically and mentally (7:5). (Timothy would have been present there by the time this letter was written having also returned from Achaia, 2 Cor 1:1.)

When Titus arrived, Paul rejoiced and gave thanks to God. Paul used a metaphor to illustrate God’s victory over Corinth. In Paul’s day the custom of the Roman triumph was well-known both to him and his hearers. Imagine this scene: the Roman general leads a train of soldiers followed by captives defeated in war; this might also include an assortment of booty or plunder and exotic animals collected in the conquest of a territory. This general with his train behind him would enter the city of Rome to approach the emperor to receive his honour. Along the roadside would be crowds of Roman citizens cheering as they hold fragrant censers or petals that fall on the road and are crushed by the horses releasing a pungent aromatic fragrance. To the crowds the smell represented the joy of Roman victory, but to the captives and slaves of the conquest this represented the future misery and possible death imposed by Rome. When Paul uses this metaphor, God is the emperor, Jesus is the Roman general, and Paul and co-workers are soldiers in Christ’s army. What about the captives? Well, some chose to submit to Roman law and were enslaved; those who refused only saw death as an option. In Corinth, the captivity involved capturing or recapturing the minds and hearts of men to obedience to Christ’s gospel, and punishing any remaining disobedience (10:5-6). This triumphal theme is also seen in some of Paul’s prison letters (Eph 4:8; Col 2:15). What lessons can we learn from this triumphal scene? Are we spreading the aroma of Christ? What does that mean? Does our sharing create a reaction, either positive or negative?

Paul continues his discourse of defence which leads into Chapter 3. The word for “peddler”, used only once in the NT, was a wine industry term of the day. It was often used of hucksters who sold cheap diluted wine as if it was authentic. These false apostles were deliberately trading a gospel that had been modified, perhaps to encompass Jewish laws or Gnostic elements of Greek philosophy; in contrast, Paul and his co-workers, sent by God and not men, spoke the gospel with sincerity and truth. How can we make every effort not to dilute the gospel in a society that has strong cultural influences over the church? What do you think the major issues are in modern-day “dilution” of the gospel?

## 2 Cor 3:1-6 — Our Sufficiency is from God

Mon 14 Oct

- Why do you think Paul refers to the letter being written on stone, rather than on papyrus, which would be the normal material for a letter in those days? (See Ezek 36:26 for a clue.)
- What does v2 tell us about Paul’s feelings for / relationship to the Corinthians? What can we take from this for today?
- Paul acknowledges that his sufficiency and competence is entirely from God (v5). (See also 1 Cor 15:9 and Phil 3:5-6.) Why do you think Paul needed to say this, in his situation? (See 2:16b.) How is this relevant to us today?
- What do you understand by “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”?

### Further Notes

Commendation, or letters of recommendation, were a traditional way of introducing oneself and establishing friendship in the ancient world. Paul is not criticising the practice in itself; he himself

effectively commends his co-workers in other letters (e.g. Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 4:17). Here, Paul's questions are rhetorical; i.e. he does not think he should have to introduce himself all over again; there should be no doubt about his status.

Most sources have "written on our hearts", i.e. on Paul and Timothy's hearts, not on the Corinthians' hearts. A letter of recommendation was usually carried with the one who was recommended. Paul is carrying around the memory of their response to his preaching, in the early days of the Corinthian church, which commends his ministry.

Translations vary as to whether the letter from Christ (v3) was "delivered by us" (ESV), "the result of our ministry" (NIV), or "produced by us" (HCS); a literal translation is "you are Christ's letter served by us". In other words, the Corinthians are who they are because of Christ's work in them *and* because of the apostles' work with them; or, more simply, because of Christ's work through the apostles.

Paul then refers to God's promises to give his people soft hearts (Ezek 11:19; 36:26; Jer 31:33) which are fulfilled in the New Covenant. "Tablets of stone" is also a reference to Exodus 31:18 and the ten commandments. This reference begins a sustained contrast between Moses' ministry with that of Paul, to the effect that living hearts better communicate God's purposes and what the lifegiving Spirit can do.

"The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" - while Paul commends the law as spiritual (Rom 7:14), it also reveals man's sinfulness and inability to keep or be saved by the law (Rom 7:9-11). The "letter" denotes an external code; Paul contrasts it with the Spirit, an indwelling power that can transform believers into the image of God.

## **2 Cor 3:7-12 — The Surpassing Glory of the New Covenant    Tue 15 Oct**

- When you think back to Exodus and Deuteronomy, in what ways would you say that the Sinai covenant had glory?
- What are the contrasts / differences made here, between the old and new covenants? Can you think of others not mentioned here? (See Romans 8:1-7 for another explanation of the contrasts between being under the Law and in the Spirit.)
- What is the result, for Paul, of contemplating the glory of the New Covenant? (3:12; 3:4-6)

### **Further Notes**

Paul digresses from discussing his own ministry to give readers the bigger picture of the differences between the old and new covenants. He makes evident that the Sinai covenant came with glory, while contrasting the old and new. There was great splendour in a ministry chiseled in stone, temporary and resulting in condemnation; how much more splendid is one that is inscribed on hearts, permanent and leading to acquittal? Even though Deuteronomy indicates that the law is life (e.g. Deut 30:19; 32:47) the NT makes plain that salvation comes only through Christ (e.g. Rom 7:10; Gal 3:21; 1 Cor 15:56). The ministry of the Spirit allows us to encounter a holy God without being destroyed, and the new covenant gives us a way to keep the law, through a transformed heart.

Boldness is elsewhere specifically linked to proclaiming the Gospel, e.g. Acts 4:13, 29, 31 and Eph 6:19-20.

## **2 Cor 3:12-18 — The Spirit of the Lord Brings Freedom    Wed 16 Oct**

- When we use the word "hope", how certain do we feel? Is Paul using it differently?
- Why do you think Moses covered his face? (v7,13)
- What sort of freedom, do you think, we have in Christ? (v17)



## Further Notes

Moses evidently veiled himself either to hide something, or to protect something. Some argue that this means Moses tried to conceal the fact that the old covenant was fading, i.e. that it was impermanent and would be replaced. (There is no hint in the Exodus account that the glory was fading, Ex 34:33-35.) Another view is that he was protecting the people of Israel, whose sinful and hardened condition meant they could not gaze at God's glory without being destroyed. (You might like to look at different translations: "minds hardened" in the ESV seems better than "made dull", NIV, as they were sinful, not unperceptive; see Deut 29:4 and Is 29:10.) Christians can see the glory of God and live, since Jesus has radically changed our status before God, with our condemnation being annulled. Without trying to be exhaustive, we can have freedom from guilt, sin, death, the old covenant, blindness to the Gospel, and freedom to enter into the loving presence of God and to do, by the Spirit's transformation, what God would want us to do.

Note that Christ mirrors God for believers. Beholding (looking at and considering) the glory of the Lord transforms us, as Christ is the image into which we grow in our inner being, being transformed through the Spirit of God. This is the beginning; the transformation must continually be made actual (Gal 4:19).

## 2 Cor 4:1-6 — God Has Shone His Light in our Hearts Thu 17 Oct

- Distortion and deception in preaching (v2) can still occur today, and we should always be alert to this. As an individual, are you focused on "the open statement of the truth" and not compromising it?
- Paul has a very clear sense of God's mercy (see also 1 Cor 7:25; 1 Tim 1:13,16) and God's grace (1 Cor 15:9-10; Gal 1:15). Do you have the same sense that your own ministry – and every disciple has some form of ministry – comes as a gift, the result of God's mercy?
- Note the centrality of Christ Jesus as Lord (v5): this is the message. How central is the person and message of Jesus, in what you share with others?
- Where else in the Bible can you recall reference to light, as an image used in relation to God or to His actions?

## Further Notes

The gospel is veiled, i.e. cannot be seen, by those blinded by the god of this world (Satan) and consumed with self-seeking desires and expectations. For unbelievers, it is the message of the cross (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2) that veils the gospel. For the Corinthians, Paul's own suffering veiled the gospel: they could not see how God's divine power and glory was present in Paul's ministry, in which he demonstrated such weakness, suffering and vulnerability.

A contrast is drawn between our God, who enlightens us (v6), and "the god of this world" (v4), who blinds unbelievers. Re light, a few examples are: Gen 1:3-4 (the creation account); Acts 9, 22, 26 regarding Paul's conversion, during which he experienced a light from heaven; see also Is 9:2, where light is used as a symbol of the end-time fulfillment of prophecy, and Is 49:6, drawing on the theme of being "a light to the nations"; there are many other examples you could look at.

## 2 Cor 4:7-12 — The Treasure and the Pot Fri 18 Oct

- What are clay pots like? What does this tell us about Paul's view of himself, in contrast to the treasure he held?
- Do you ever feel like a "clay pot"? How can these verses be an encouragement?
- v10-12: As Paul is given over to suffering, the life of Jesus is manifest and is working for good in the lives of those he serves. While Paul's sufferings – and achievements – seem to be on a

different scale than most of ours, are you seeing this principle worked out in your life and in those around you? (See also 1:6; 5:15; Phil 2:5-11.)

### **Further Notes**

Clay pots were common, everyday, fragile, inferior, lowly, expendable items. They were from cheap material; if broken they were thrown away, not mended. The image makes very plain that the glorious treasure they contain – the light and glory of the gospel – really has nothing to do with the pot. (See also 1 Cor 1:27-28; no-one may boast before God.)

The Corinthians apparently could not see why the unsurpassed glory of the ministry of the Spirit sat alongside tribulation, suffering and death. Paul points out here that it shows that the extraordinary power can only come from God, and not from himself. This is at the heart of the gospel: glory comes from both cross and resurrection. In Paul's ministry, suffering and death are an identification with Jesus in his final hours of dying, by which our new life became possible. God's salvation has come to us through the weakness of the crucified Jesus, and the saving gospel also is reaching the Gentiles through the weakness of his apostle Paul.

## **2 Cor 4:13-15 — We Believe, Therefore We Speak**

**Mon 21 Oct**

- Read Psalm 116, cited in v13 (Ps 116:10). What similarities are there between Paul's and the psalmist's state of mind and situation?
- What is the basis of Paul's boldness in speech and preaching (v14)? Personally – if lacking boldness – do you think you've sufficiently internalised this message?
- What is Paul's ultimate aim, as Christ's apostle?

### **Further Notes**

v14: God will raise us with Jesus and present us together in His presence. Note: to be presented can have many meanings, but the main ones here are perhaps to stand before a judge or a king, or to be presented as a sacrificial gift. (See also 4:16-5:10, especially 5:9-10.)

Both the psalmist and Paul are faithful, righteous individuals, whose suffering will not silence them. Paul's faith, however, is grounded on the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, good news which requires proclamation.

v15: The word for grace ("charis") is clearly related to the word for thanksgiving or gratitude ("euchariston"). For Paul and those to whom God's grace is extended, it results in an overflow of gratitude, i.e. appreciation for a wonderful gift that is not deserved, that meets the need of the person receiving it and brings glory to God who gives it. Note that while Paul states that his service is for the sake of the Corinthians, his ultimate aim is that thanksgiving be increased, to the glory of God.

## **2 Cor 4:16-5:3 — Momentary Afflictions**

**Tue 22 Oct**

- 4:16 Here Paul explains how we do not give up even though our flesh begins to fail with age or illness, "wasting away". How do you respond to illness? Do you take encouragement from God's promise of an immortal, imperishable body? Although outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are renewed daily. What does this mean? And how are we inwardly renewed? How is this linked to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?
- 4:17 Paul calls our troubles "momentary afflictions." What impact would it have on your life if you regarded all of life's problems in this way? These temporary troubles do have a silver lining. The troubles we face in life, by refining our faith, produce for us genuine and tested

faith which ultimately will produce an incomparable eternal weight of glory. Think of a trial you have been through since becoming a Christian. What effect has it had on your faith? Has it made you stronger? Now, consider whether you are feeling down about a current problem in your life. Why not invest a few moments in focusing your thoughts on the eternal rest that awaits when you enter into God's peace? In that place your house, your car, your prized possessions will be insignificant. So too will any worries you carry with you right now!

- 4:18 By reminding the reader about the future eternal glory, Paul effectively reminds us to fix our eyes on the prize, to live by faith and not by sight. What can you do, practically, to help you achieve this? See also Philemon 1:6 for Paul's take on the benefits of sharing our faith.
- 5:1 Paul refers to our bodies as earthly tents. We are reminded that when they are destroyed, we have a permanent building in heaven. Why do you think he describes our bodies this way? Like a tent, effectively our bodies are a temporary structure during our short time on earth, a mere vehicle for us to move around in. Our permanent homes are still to be revealed and when they are, what glory! No doubt this will be breathtaking. What this means is that we have a wonderful hope and should not fear death.
- 5:2 Paul writes that we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. Does your own sinful nature wear you down? Do you look around at injustice, and despair at the lack of integrity of people around you, criminals who prey on the vulnerable, gangs of youths who are prepared to carry knives and use them without any fear of the law? Effectively, if you do, you are groaning inwardly and longing for the perfection that will come on Jesus' return, when we will put on our new imperishable spiritual bodies.
- 5:3 What is the significance of not being found naked? When unclothed we can feel vulnerable. God provided clothing for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they became aware of their nakedness as they had become self-conscious. Once clothed in our heavenly dwelling we will no longer be vulnerable. We will be secure, we will be at home.

### Further Notes

See also Romans 8:18-27 for more on present suffering and future glory, and 1 Corinthians 2:9 for more scriptural inspiration on the theme of what God has in store for us.

### Prayer Focus

Ask God to help you to focus on your eternal prize and not on any worries that are weighing you down. Thank him for the temporary body you live in because you are fearfully and wonderfully made.

## 2 Cor 5:4-10 — Living by Faith

Wed 23 Oct

- 5:4 Paul appears to be alluding to a faith so strong that we yearn to be in our heavenly dwelling. He also writes about the mortal being swallowed up by life not by death. This is a clever reversal of the age old image of death and the grave being the great swallower (Pr 1:12) and mirrors Isaiah 25:8. Think about that for a moment. Just as death swallows our mortal bodies, God swallows death and gives life. When was the last time you meditated on being in heaven with God and all his angels and all the multitude of faithful Christians and prophets of God throughout the ages? See also Philippians 3:21 – we will be transformed.
- 5:5 God has made us for the purpose of residing eternally with him, and we have been given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee. When we buy an expensive item, we are usually given the option at the point of sale to pay for a warranty guaranteeing repair or replacement, should the item break down. These extended warranties can be very expensive and last for only a few years. The guarantee we have from God lasts a lifetime and is free of charge. The original Greek word in the scripture translated as “guarantee” is arrhabon, and is the word for a pledge or deposit as security for the full amount to follow. God means to complete what he has started.

- 5:6 Why do you think Paul writes about always being confident? He begins the verse with “therefore”; hence clearly he is always confident because of the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as described in the previous verse. Keep in mind also that the Corinthian church members were no strangers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which would have been evident amongst certain members. Therefore the notion that the Spirit guaranteed the promise would have struck a chord with them.
- 5:7 How confident in your faith are you right now? Is there any area of faith and doctrine where you lack confidence? Resolve to talk through the issue with another disciple. Why not make it the focus of your Bible study?
- 5:8 Paul develops this theme introduced in v4 and spells it out plainly; he would prefer to be away from his human temporary body and with the Lord in His home. Does this describe your longing to be with God in Heaven? With the frantic pace of life for the average Christian in the West, this is probably far from the norm. When you attain that level of faith, you’ll have arrived at a remarkable place spiritually.
- 5:9 Paul writes about making it “our goal to please him.” When we rise in the morning this should be on our hearts. Is this something you think about during your day? When we set our goals we work towards achieving them. Think of some area of your life today where you can work towards pleasing our Father in Heaven.
- 5:10 Paul writes about how we all must appear before the judgement seat of Christ. It is a sobering thought that we will be judged for the things we have done, whether good or bad. Is there any area of your life where you are not doing well spiritually, any unrepentant sin? Resolve to speak to someone about it and bring it out into the open. Repent and enjoy a time of refreshing and renewal (Acts 3:19). Even though this verse records Peter’s admonition to listening non-believers, the same principle applies to believers who are building with straw rather than with gold, silver and precious stones (see 1 Cor 3:12-15) or who have fallen into sin.

### Prayer Focus

Thank God for the certainty of his promises and the great future in his dwelling that He has prepared for you. Remember you are designed for this purpose. Why not spend a few moments in quiet contemplation on what it will be like surrounded by your brothers and sisters in the body of Christ as God reveals himself in His full glory?

## 2 Cor 5:11-15 — Christ’s Love Compels Us

Thu 24 Oct

- 5:11 Paul had been writing about the future glory in our heavenly dwelling. He now moves on to develop the theme of reconciliation between our holy God and sinful mankind. Who is this reconciliation for? There is no universal salvation. If such a doctrine were true there would be no need to spread the Gospel. Are you trying to persuade others? We are accountable to Jesus for this (v10 and Matt 28:19), not just with respect to unbelievers but also for our brothers and sisters in the Church who err in deeds or doctrine. Paul in his writing dedicated a fair amount of time to persuading the Corinthian Church that he was their genuine apostle, as opposed to the false teachers who had infiltrated the church. Paul’s theology of the cross was at odds with their theology of glory and personal advancement (those who take pride in what is seen rather than what is in the heart).
- 5:12 Why do you think Paul was keen for the readers to take pride in him and his fellow workers? Was this to counteract what his opponents were taking pride in? Corinth was a crossroad for travellers and traders hence a wealthy city; there was no doubt plenty of opportunity to make money in an established growing economy. Perhaps Church members were taking pride in their homes, status, their work, education, etc. Sound familiar? Many temptations recur through time. What do you take pride in? Are they things that Jesus would approve of?

- 5:13 The fact that Paul wrote “if we are out of our mind” possibly indicates that this accusation was bandied about concerning him and his close associates in church-planting, Timothy and Titus for example, probably by the would-be leaders who opposed him. Perhaps these men were wealthy and wise from a worldly perspective. Remember Greek culture placed a very high premium on wisdom. Many of Paul’s readers may have been questioning his state of mind. Why were they saying this about him? What advice or admonitions had Paul given to them in relation to their current lifestyles? Would this have had anything to do with how they spent their money? (See 1 Cor 16:1-2 which advocates a regular collection of money in keeping with income).
- 5:14 Paul gives his decisive answer to this accusation. Does the love of Christ compel you? Or is it fear? The world has a warped view of God as the Judge who will send his created beings to hell for not obeying him, but the truth is that sin leads to death. Think about it in this way: All of mankind is drowning in sin. Death is inevitable, but Jesus is the lifeboat that can save us from drowning. It is our own choice as to whether we make that metaphorical swim towards our salvation. How does Jesus’ sacrifice spur you on? Are you willing to live your life in such a way that it attracts attention from the non-believers you live near or work with? Even more, are you willing to live your life in a way that attracts attention from church members? Such a lifestyle will no doubt create opportunities for explaining your faith and how Christ’s love compels you!
- 5:15 As Jesus died for all, all should live for Christ. This was a calling to the Corinthian church to adjust their lives in accordance with the sacrifice of Christ. How evident in your life is this calling? Is Christ at the centre? Is Christ the first thing you think about when the sun rises and the last thing as the sun falls? What are the adjustments you need to make in your lifestyle to help you grow spiritually and live for Christ?

### Further Notes

See Col 1:15-23 and 1 Thess 4:16-18 for more on Jesus’ glory.

### Prayer Focus

Ask God to strengthen you as you determine to bring Him into the centre of your life. Thank him for the opportunities for building and serving in his church that he will present to you as you grow in the grace of giving and serving.

## 2 Cor 5:16-19a — A New Creation to Minister Reconciliation Fri 25 Oct

- What do you think Paul meant by regarding others from a worldly point of view (or “according to the flesh”, depending on your translation)?
- How can we today be tempted to regard others from a worldly point of view?
- In v17, who is Paul broadly addressing, and what do you think Paul means by being a new creation?
- Contrast your old way of life and your new way of life (use a table if this helps). In what ways can you specifically lose sight that you are a new creation?
- From the text, what does the ministry of reconciliation refer to? What does it mean to be involved in a ministry of reconciliation today?

### Further Notes

With the broad goal of defending his apostleship from opponents within the Corinthian church, Paul in the previous passage has emphasised that Christ’s love demonstrated by the cross should drive a profound change in how we view others.



Even though his opponents tended to judge him by externals, the Corinthians are urged to not use the same measure. Some externals that Paul's opponents and consequently the broader church could have been using to make comparisons could have been: slave or free, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, wise or simple, having or not having a particular gift, who you did or didn't know (Apollos, Cephas, Paul). Comparing with 1 Cor 1:26-27 and 1 Cor 3:21-23, we can see the Corinthians were prone to some of these comparisons.

Today, in our struggle with our flesh, we are still subject to making these comparisons. However, driven by Christ's statement of love on the cross, we are encouraged, urged and have the power available to change our views, so we can practically speaking live as a new creation. Our lives as new creations start with our fellowship with God on earth and will continue in larger dimensions when we are united with God in heaven.

From a human perspective, it is unusual that the wronged party should take the initiative to reconcile. However, God takes the first steps in seeking reconciliation with us and with the world, although we are the wrongdoers.

Although from the text, Paul could have been referring to himself and his associates apart from the Corinthians, all Christians are called to be engaged in the same ministry of reconciliation as we share God's gospel with others. Reconciliation could also mean reconciliation within the church, as parts of the body resolve and forgive grievances. Paul could have had in mind his reconciliation with the church in Corinth.

Note that reconciliation is one step further than justification. While justification may not result in a relationship with one's judge, God reaches out in reconciliation to form an ongoing relationship with us. Reconciliation involves admission of the wrong done, repentance and acceptance of God's offer of enduring relationship.

## 2 Cor 5:19b-6:2 — The Appeal from Ambassadors

Mon 28 Oct

- What adjectives or attitudes would you associate with an ambassador? How can you adopt some of these attitudes as a Christian ?
- From the text, to what lengths is God willing to go so that we are reconciled with him?
- Does the passage hint that Christians can be unreconciled with God, and if so, what risks are they exposed to? Also, what attitudes do you think such a Christian should pursue?
- Read the passage in Is 49:1-9 and especially v8 which is referred to in 2 Cor 6:2. What is the tone of the chapter in Isaiah, and why do you think Paul refers to it here?

Ambassadors, in the Old and New Testament, were messengers who carried an authorised understanding of their master's mind and policy. Paul saw his role as ambassador for Christ to involve effective communication of Christ's heart and intentions.

Paul implores the Corinthians to be reconciled with God and not receive God's grace in vain. It may be that God's grace had not had an effect on their hearts and lives. We can't be sure what triggered this strong appeal. It could be that Paul's opponents in Corinth were undermining the faith of other believers by their life (not living as an exemplary new creation) and doctrine (not supporting the true gospel). Or it could be that the the Corinthians' continuing associations with idols was endangering their faith (see 6:14-7:1). In any case, personal reconciliation with God has to be something ongoing for Christians in light of the cross of Christ. Also, although this passage may have originally applied to the apostles of Christ, it nevertheless describes the role all Christians share in bringing the gospel to the world.

In 6:1 Paul mentions the close partnership that the apostles have with God, while acknowledging their inadequacy for the task (3:5). Receiving the grace of God may be an appeal to not miss out living the life of a new creation in Christ and risk disconnection with Christ and falling away.

In 6:2, Paul's point in citing Is 49:8 is that the great change brought about by Christ's redeeming work is something even greater than the return from Babylon that was prophesied by Isaiah. The Corinthians are urged not to miss this opportunity, but to be decisive and to act. Also, just as God

raised up Isaiah to speak through him and call people out of Babylon, so Paul is God's mouthpiece to announce this great salvation.

## **2 Cor 6:3-13 — Authority through Suffering**

**Tue 29 Oct**

- From the arguments Paul has presented so far, can you make an educated guess of what issues Paul's opponents might have been bringing against him? That is, what kind of faults (v3 ESV) or discredit (NIV, NASB) were being raised about his ministry?
- Why has Paul listed this "resume" at this point and how does this support his appeal in v11-13?
- Although these difficulties are specific to Paul and his associates in terms of apostleship, how are they applicable to our Christianity today? Can you relate to any of these difficulties, and how have your difficulties drawn you closer to God?
- Paul summarises what was commendable in his ministry by the power of God; something the Corinthians must have observed themselves, but it seems that their memories were rather short. For today, do we ourselves stop to remember and appreciate how God has chosen and worked through those who have led us or been examples to us?

Through these passages you can perhaps hear many of the unfair accusations brought against Paul by his opponents, particularly from v9.

Paul's primary purpose in 6:4-10 is to commend and defend his ministry and provide a clear example for the Corinthians to emulate. One cannot observe Paul's lifestyle without wondering what his motivation could be; despite huge difficulties, his clear purpose, joy and contentment would point to God's love, power and sustenance working in his life.

In all this, Paul shows a life of endurance fuelled by God's power and the Holy Spirit. In the face of enormous challenges, Paul demonstrates the qualities of joy, confidence in God and constantly pouring out love, kindness and consideration for the church he had planted.

Finally, Paul makes an appeal for the Corinthians to warm up to him and his associates. Where the Corinthians are called to reconcile with God in the previous chapter, they are now called to reconcile with Paul and his apostleship. Paul links these two appeals in 6:1, in that rejecting his apostleship implies rejecting reconciliation with God.

## **2 Cor 6:14-16a — Set Apart (Part 1)**

**Wed 30 Oct**

This section deals with how we are to view our relationships with non-believers. We are called to not be yoked with unbelievers. Paul then throws out some rhetorical questions that bring into focus the huge differences between Christians and non-Christians and, using OT references, calls us to set ourselves apart from the world around us.

- Write down your understanding of the terms "yoked" and "unbeliever".
- From a brief look at 1 and 2 Corinthians, what do you think Paul had in mind when he said "do not be yoked with unbelievers"?
- How do you think Paul would define an "unbeliever"?
- On a practical level, what do you think Paul was asking the Corinthian Christians to do or not do?
- How can you tell if you are yoked, or becoming yoked, with an unbeliever?
- What kinds of relationships with non-believers do you think are acceptable? What kinds do you think are not acceptable?

## Further Notes

Paul has just accused the Corinthian Christians of withholding their affections. In his view, he was not withholding affection but they were (6:14-7:1). He seems to be concerned that they are directing their affections elsewhere, that they are being strongly influenced by non-believers. Two words are key here: “yoked” and “unbeliever”, and our understanding of what these words mean is crucial in our implementation of what this passage is saying and indeed what God wants us to hear.

**Yoked** – Paul uses an agricultural term, which means the joining together of two animals with a restraint in order to undergo a specific task. Dt 22:10 prohibits the yoking of unequal animals. The principle appears to be associated with the inevitable conflict that will arise in regard to the ability to carry out their primary function, the work prescribed. This scripture is commonly used (and most agree correctly used) in regard to marriage, to warn against Christians marrying non-Christians, and about the dangers of building deep emotional relationships with someone of the opposite sex who is not a disciple, or dating or marrying such a person. However, in context, considering the issues being addressed by Paul in this letter, it probably refers generally to “influences”. Are you allowing yourself to be influenced by the world in such a way that you do not notice that you are being drawn away from God?

**Unbeliever** – In New Testament language, the term “believer” means the same thing as “(true) Christian”, and it is used interchangeably with other terms like “brother” and “saint”. It is never used in a sense that would include nominal Christians, but should be understood as referring to people who have made a commitment to Christ via faith, repentance and baptism. The term “unbeliever” (the word also means “unfaithful”) refers to anyone else. Crucial to our implementation of this instruction is to correctly differentiate between Christians and non-Christians, and particularly between true and nominal Christians, as we are more likely to let down our guard and be led astray by people claiming to be Christians. When Jesus says that he came to seek and save what was lost and calls us to do the same, we must be able to identify someone who is lost in order to save them. We must have convictions identifying unbelievers.

## 2 Cor 6:14-16a — Set Apart (Part 2)

Thu 31 Oct

Please read over yesterday’s quiet time study again.

## Further Notes

We all like to believe that we can be around ungodly things as much as we want, and that we are strong enough to ward off their influence. But we must take seriously the words of Scripture: “Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Cor 15:33). It comes back to a simple question: are we being conformed to this world, or are we being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2)? How do you know if you are being yoked with an unbeliever? This could include marrying, or building a relationship that could potentially end up in marriage (dating, building emotional connections, etc.), or more generally any relationship (money, business, circle of “friends”) that could lead you to compromise your convictions and could end with you leaving God.

In the text, Paul poses 5 rhetorical questions to help us understand the principle. With the questions presented this way, most of us would answer quite emphatically – believers and unbelievers have nothing in common! In context, Paul is asking the Corinthian Christians to recognise the stark differences between those committed to following Christ and those who are not; these differences should convince us that “being yoked” to a non-believer is a ridiculous notion.

## Suggested Implementation

- If you have developed or feel you are developing relationships with non-Christians that are causing you to compromise on your relationship with God, talk to someone in the fellowship.
- Pray that God will expose any areas of poor judgement you might have in the area of relationships with non-Christians.
- Make decisions to prioritise relationships within the church and look for opportunities to encourage others.

## 2 Cor 6:16b-7:1 — Purify Yourselfs

Fri 1 Nov

Paul calls on the Corinthian Christians to reflect on God's promises (2 Cor 6:16-18) and, in view of these promises, to purify themselves. He mentions two parts of our being that require cleansing: our bodies (or flesh) and our spirit. Holiness is the objective, driven by an attitude of deep respect and awe towards the great God we serve.

- Looking back at the promises in 2 Cor 6:16-18, what do you think Paul is trying to invoke in the Corinthian Christians?
- What things do you think were contaminating the body and spirit of the Corinthian Christians?
- How do you think God's promises that Paul referred to would help the Corinthian Christians purify themselves?
- What areas of your life need purifying?
- What do you understand "perfecting holiness" to mean and how can you "perfect holiness" in your life?

### Further Notes

The promises of God are wonderful. For many of us they help in motivating us to serve God and engage in the mission. They also help us to put our challenges in perspective, to make sense of our lives, and to understand why we need to make particular choices.

It is interesting to note that the promises Paul refers to were made originally to Israel. However Paul applies the same promises to the Corinthian Christians, the Church (spiritual Israel, Rom 9:6; Gal 6:16): "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." This is a loose combination of Lev 26:11-12 and Ezek 37:27 from the Septuagint. The promise shows the intimacy God is looking for in our relationship with Him. If God is to be so intimate with us, Paul then quotes from Is 52:11; Zeph 3:19-20: "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." God's people are to disassociate themselves from sinners and unbelievers lest they be caught up in their judgment (Rev 18:4).

"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." The promise made to Solomon, 1 Chr 28:6, is here applied to all believers. What a wonderful promise. It is hard to grasp the idea of divine adoption – it restores our dignity and our worth after these have been destroyed by our own sin and the sins of others against us.

So, having being reminded of these promises, the Corinthian Christians had a choice to make: to continue to be yoked to unbelievers or to purify themselves and separate themselves from things that contaminate. We need to be clear that our own efforts cannot make us pure or holy. 1 John 1:9 says "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness". However, 1 John 3:3 says "All who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure". So God purifies us, but our role is to purify ourselves. We need to consider what is contaminating our flesh (probably refers to things we do) and our spirit (which probably refers to our attitudes, our thoughts).

### Suggested Implementation

- Reflect on these promises of God and consider an appropriate response.
- Take time to consider what things contaminate your body and your spirit: it could be what you watch on TV, the music you listen to, the opinions you are swayed towards, the magazines you read, the people you spend time with.
- What actions can you take to purify yourself?

## 2 Cor 7:2-7 — Commitment to Making Fellowship Deep Mon 4 Nov

Paul is trying to correct a view some of the Corinthian Christians had of him. He felt he was being misunderstood. He shares some of his personal trials and struggles to convince his readers that he is genuine in his motives. His joy comes from his knowledge that the church is striving to do what is right in God's sight.

- What do you think Paul meant when he said “make room for us in your hearts”? How do others know that you have made room for them in your heart?
- Why do you think Paul's motives were in doubt?
- How do you feel about church leadership in regards to trusting their motives?
- What are some healthy ways we can deal with negative thoughts towards those who lead?
- How do you feel when you are misunderstood?
- How do you think Paul can say “in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds”? Think of ways you can imitate Paul's attitude.
- Paul had been very candid with the Corinthians, and they had responded quite well. How do you respond when receiving input?

### Further Notes

This is Paul's final attempt in these chapters to get his readers to accept the legitimacy of his ministry and open their hearts to him. Paul is concerned to ensure the Corinthian Christians do not misunderstand his intentions. There are many factors that can contribute to us being misunderstood or misunderstanding others; for example, sometimes we only hear select words that resonate with us and miss other things being said, or we may prejudge one another. He points out that he has not wronged, corrupted nor exploited anyone. He might have pointed this out to imply that these are the actions of the false “apostles”; alternatively, he might have been simply calling the church to reason through more carefully their negative treatment of him, after which he hoped they would conclude that he has indeed treated them quite fairly. Paul writes, “I have said before”, which he now repeats, “You have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you”. No such statement can be found earlier in the letter, so it is likely that he expressed himself in this fashion either on his second visit or in a recent communication to them (perhaps in the severe letter). The fact that he has to repeat himself shows that the depth of his commitment to them has not really sunk in. The place the Corinthians have in his heart is such that Paul can say, “We would live or die with you”. His affirmation is a strong one and not unlike the wedding vows that couples have traditionally made to one another: “For better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part”. Paul is committed to his relationship with the church at Corinth. Paul is very confident in his tone, imparting encouraging words to the Christians: You have such a place in our hearts (v3), I take great pride in you (v4).

Paul does not provide any details about the harassment he encountered. The most he says is that it took the form of conflicts on the outside and fears within. The conflicts without are undoubtedly some kind of persecution or opposition. We know from Acts that Paul was pursued from city to city by a group of hostile, unbelieving Jews who stirred up trouble for him wherever he went. The term conflict is frequently used in Hellenistic Greek for military combat or sporting contests. Whether Paul's choice of words points to physical threats of some kind is not clear. But he could equally be talking about quarrels and fighting (2 Tim 2:23; Tit 3:9; Jas 4:1).

### Suggested Implementation

- Do you wholeheartedly accept those who lead you spiritually? If not, think through your reservations and fears and, if necessary, talk through these with the relevant people.
- If you lead others spiritually, do you regularly share with them words of encouragement to build them up?
- Consider how you may provide comfort to someone in distress.



## 2 Cor 7:8-16 — Being Sorrowful as God Intended

Tue 5 Nov

Paul reflects on a difficult letter written earlier to the Corinthians and expresses his encouragement at their response. The focus of his encouragement is the fact that they became sorrowful as God intended, with the appropriate response of repentance.

- Why do you think the earlier letter had hurt the Corinthians?
- How did Paul know the Christians had repented? Are we qualified to judge other people's repentance by our observations of them and, if so, how?
- What helps you to become sorrowful as God intended?
- How can you tell when you have repented?
- What is your understanding of the differences between worldly and Godly sorrow? Can you recognise areas in your life where your sorrow is worldly and where it is godly?

### Further Notes

Often words of correction can be painful. So it takes great courage to speak words of correction, as this puts relationships at risk. Paul expresses openly the regrets he had in writing certain things to the Corinthians. However he realises that indeed that was the right thing to do as it helped produce godly sorrow, which is a sorrow not towards what Paul had said but a sorrow towards God. The following characteristics describe the response of the Corinthians and point to their repentance:

- Earnestness – seriousness; not taking Paul's concerns lightly. Staying on the path of repentance takes a serious attitude.
- Eagerness to clear yourselves – this could mean: (1) to provide evidence to support our being non complicit in an offence, clearing ourselves of blame; or (2) to admit our offence and yet have the blessing as Christians of being cleared as a result of the forgiveness that follows.
- Indignation – Profound displeasure. Maybe they were indignant towards the false teachers, or indignant towards themselves at letting some of the things go on in the church. We should be indignant at ourselves for our foolishness in sin.
- Alarm (phobos, fear) – Alarms are external triggers that awaken us to impending danger and indicate a time to take action. What were they alarmed about? Maybe they hadn't realised how serious some of the situations were in the church. Maybe they were alarmed at their level of tolerance of sin.
- Longing – means a yearning for and desire in a good sense. Possibly the desire was to restore a good relationship with Paul, or a desire for purity and godliness.
- Concern – probably concern for Paul, or for one another, or that their path to repentance goes well.
- Readiness to see justice done – the language is judicial, suggesting a quick reaction to rectify the wrong, to punish the offender. There was a concern to see the wrong righted, such as agreement on a form of discipline carried out by the congregation as a whole.

At the end of this chapter, Paul is praising the Corinthian Christians. They seem to be in a place of victory. But in the "sorrowful letter" (mentioned in 2 Cor 2:1) there was no praise. What was the difference? The real repentance, reported by Titus and commented on by Paul in this chapter.

### Suggested Implementation

- Spend some time making sure you understand the kind of sorrow that God desires concerning the things we do or don't do that go against His will.
- What areas of your life make you sorrowful? Consider specific areas of repentance that may help overcome this sorrow.

## 2 Cor 8:1-10 — The Grace and Ministry of Giving

Wed 6 Nov

Not only did Paul want the Corinthians to be reconciled with each other over the issues that divided them, he also wanted them to be a generous church. Chapters 8 and 9 address the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. The collection for the poor in Jerusalem was viewed by Paul as an essential spiritual ministry similar in importance to the building of the temple in Exodus 25:1-9 and 35:4-29. Paul wanted the Corinthians to have the heart to give as in Exodus 36:3-7. He used the example of the Macedonians to spur the Corinthians onward to excel in this ministry of giving. When referring to the Macedonians, Paul was probably referring to the two main cities that he had visited in that area, namely Philippi and Thessalonica. The Macedonians were going through severe trials and poverty which made their “rich generosity” and their “urgent pleading” for the privilege of sharing in this service (diakonia) all the more inspiring for the Corinthians.

8:5 “They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will”. The Macedonians gave “themselves”, i.e. all that they had, possessions and their very selves, to the Lord, and so they did not consider anything that they had to be their own. They were not trying to be kind and compassionate by giving some of their money and resources, but rather they were pleased to be able to send God’s resources, which God had given them stewardship over, wherever God wanted to use them.

Paul makes it clear to the Corinthians that he is not commanding them (v8), but advising them (v10). Paul is careful in his leadership not to create an atmosphere that results in the Corinthians responding in a legalistic way to the call to give. Rather, he is encouraging them to give willingly. Legalism tells people how they are to act and disciplines them when they do not follow the rules. Legalism, however, does not change the heart, and it is a heart change that Paul is looking for in the Corinthians.

- How would you feel about the example of the Macedonians? Would you be inspired to give? Or would you feel shamed or manipulated into giving?
- What difference does it make when we first give ourselves to Jesus before we give to others?
- Take a moment to consider how you give. Do you give out of a sense of obligation and guilt, or out of a heart that reflects your gratitude for all God has blessed you with?
- Is there anything that you hesitate to give to God?

### Prayer Focus

- Pray for a heart that is willing to offer all you have to Jesus. Thank him that all you have is from him.
- Ask God to show you how he would have you use the resources he has given you. Ask him to show you where he would have you contribute to his kingdom.

## 2 Cor 8:10-12 — The Acceptable Gift

Thu 7 Nov

A year earlier (1 Cor 16:1-4) Paul had given instructions to the church in Corinth about how they should save for the collection for the saints of Jerusalem. The plan would have helped the giving not to be burdensome and the eventual completion and collection of the gift would have been easier. This had come to a halt; when and why is unclear. In any case, Paul now felt it was appropriate to remind the church of their initial desire to give, and to encourage them to complete the collection they had started. Paul provides four basic principles for the Ministry of Giving. We’ll look at the first two today:

- 1st Principle - Willingness to give makes the gift acceptable (v12). Compare with the offerings of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:3-5) and the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-23).
- 2nd Principle - Give according to what you have (v12). Sometimes in the face of a great need we feel that the little we have to give will be of little value. We forget that Jesus can do miracles with a little given wholeheartedly (Mark 6:30-44).

## Questions

- What role does our attitude play in the grace of giving?
- If giving unwillingly makes the gift unacceptable, should the unwilling stop giving or stop being unwilling? Which is easier?
- Have you ever struggled or failed to follow through in your giving? Explain.

## Prayer Focus

- Ask God to open your eyes to the needs of the body of Christ around you. Ask Him to enable you to follow through on your desire to give.

## 2 Cor 8:13-15 — Equity and Ability

Fri 8 Nov

Continuing from yesterday's devotional, we will today look at the third and fourth principles provided by Paul to help guide the Corinthians to give in a way that pleases the Lord.

- 3rd Principle - Equality (v13).  
Paul reminds the Corinthians that the goal in their giving is not that they should suffer while others prosper, but that they give sacrificially of their plenty so that the Jerusalemites may have enough. To underline this principle, he draws their attention in verse 15 to Exodus 16:18 where the Israelites gathered manna in the desert and each had enough for his needs.
- 4th Principle - As we have been given to, so should we give (v14).  
Paul reminds the Corinthians that the surplus of some could minister to the deficit of others, i.e. that they could give out of their plenty to assist those who had less.

The heart of equality that Paul sought to communicate to the Corinthians can be seen exemplified in Acts 2:42-47.

## Questions

- What is the principle of equality that Paul spoke of here?
- How should this influence our use of the resources God has given us?
- What has God blessed you with in abundance? Why?
- Be it wealth, possessions, talents, spiritual gifts or fruits of the Spirit, can this be what the Lord wants you to share with the body?

## Prayer Focus

- You have given me so much, Lord, how can I give this back to the body? Show me how.

## 2 Cor 8:16–9:5 — Administration and Accountability

Mon 11 Nov

Having encouraged the Corinthians to complete the collection with the right heart (8:7-15), Paul now picks up where he left off in verse 6 with the sending of Titus and two companions who will help bring the collection to a fitting conclusion. It should be noted that this was not Paul's original plan (1 Cor 16:3-4). But in view of the recent discord amongst the Corinthians and to protect himself from any accusations of embezzlement, Paul has commissioned others as representatives of the participating churches to collect and deliver the collection. Compare with the similar procedure in Ezra 8:24-30.

Paul begins by stating that he had urged Titus to accept the commission (v6) and Titus, who had a heart for the Corinthians, had enthusiastically accepted the appeal. Paul then goes on to introduce, but not by name, a second brother “who is praised by all the churches”, and a third brother, described as zealous (v22). These men will administer the “liberal gift”, literally, “abundance”.

The three-fold ministry of the representatives (literally, “apostles”) of the churches was to:

- 1) Ensure that the entire collection and distribution process was accomplished with complete honesty and integrity (8:20-21).
- 2) Encourage the completion of the collection (8:24). The Corinthians had made a promise of a gift (8:10). It was their responsibility to follow through on that promise. The brothers were to encourage the completion of this offering, to hold the Corinthians accountable to their promise and to help them follow through.
- 3) Ensure that the gift was given with the right heart, a willing heart (9:5).

### Questions

- How careful is Paul being by commissioning well known disciples to administer the collection in order to avoid any accusation of embezzlement?
- Note that Paul is taking great care to be blameless in the eyes of men, and disciples at that! What do we learn here about the importance of accountability in this matter of finances in the church?

### Prayer Focus

- Ask God to help you make every effort to be blameless in all things before Him and before men, so that God may be glorified as a result.

## 2 Cor 9:1-15 — The Ministry of Giving

Tue 12 Nov

Having encouraged the church in Corinth to complete the collection in chapter 8, Paul now generalizes his remarks to apply to the disciples in Achaia as a whole. Remember (2 Cor 1:1), this is a circular letter, meant to be read to the church in Corinth and then circulated to the other churches in Achaia.

### Questions

- To what lengths does Paul go to ensure that the Corinthians complete the collection with the right heart? How important then is it to have the right attitude in our giving?
- Paul quotes from the Old Testament twice in chapter 9. Name the books, chapter and verses. How often do you use scripture to inspire others?
- What kind of harvest are you expecting to reap in the Kingdom? Are you sowing the right seed in order to reap that harvest?
- What does giving have to do with the gospel (v13)?
- How does God receive praise through the ministry of giving?

In summary, Paul broadens his address to include all the churches of Achaia, highlighting the main points:

- While the Corinthians inspired the Macedonians to give, the Macedonians can inspire the Corinthians to complete their giving with the right heart (v2-4).
- He sees to the administration and accountability of the collection by sending trusted disciples to encourage the completion of the collection (v5).

- He discusses the importance of having the right heart in giving (v6-8), while assuring the disciples that God not only enables those who give to give but also rewards them (v9-11).
- He reminds them that others will see the generosity of their hearts and praise God for it (v12-14).
- Finally he reminds them that God gave his only son for them (v15).

## 2 Cor 10-13: True and False Apostles

Chapters 10-13 form the final section of 2 Corinthians. The change of subject and of tone at the beginning of chapter 10 is so abrupt that some people think it must be part of a different letter, written at a different time, and incorporated into what we know of as 2 Corinthians by an editor at a later date. The arguments for and against the various explanations are too detailed to discuss here, but they are all somewhat speculative, as we do not know enough about the historical situation to give an exact account of Paul's dealings with the church in Corinth. The manuscript evidence is however unanimous: no existing manuscript has the sections or chapters in a different arrangement from what we have in our modern Bibles. So I take the view that 2 Corinthians is in its original form, and I will address the apparent contradictions as we come to them.

In these chapters, Paul writes very strongly against a group of people who were endangering the church in Corinth. It is difficult to work out from the text exactly who these people were, and this situation is not mentioned anywhere else. We can piece together the following facts: the offenders were a minority ("some" 10:2,12); they claimed to be apostles (11:13); they preached a different gospel (11:4); they were Jewish (11:22); they were boastful (11:18) and aggressive (11:20). The problems appear similar to those faced in the Galatian church, where a different gospel (Gal 1:6-9) was being taught by a Jewish "circumcision group" who claimed links to the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal 2:12; 5:1-12; 6:12-14). But there is no mention of circumcision in 2 Corinthians; instead two types of sins are mentioned: quarreling in the church (12:20) and sexual/sensual sin (12:21). So perhaps the opponents were teaching a worldly message ("God will give you a great life") instead of the self-denial to which Jesus calls us. Self-denial is certainly the focus of Paul's argument to prove that he is an authentic apostle (11:23-29).

### 2 Cor 10:1-6 — A Change of Mood

Wed 13 Nov

- Why does Paul appeal to Jesus' meekness and gentleness (10:1)? How should we deal with opposition or sin in the church? (See v9; 1 Cor 4:21; Gal 6:1.)
- What is the difference between living in the world and living by the world's standards?
- Should a Christian wage war? If so, how?
- Based on this, how do you think Paul would "punish disobedience" (10:6)?

### Further Notes

The threatening tone of the final chapters is quite different to "I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you" (7:16), but it was perhaps only a small part of the church, possibly not even Corinthians themselves ("some people", 10:2; see also 10:11-12; 11:13) who were causing trouble, and Paul urged the church to deal with them. He did not want to have a showdown with his opponents, which might distract people from the gospel message that he was preaching.

In verses 2-4, the contrast is literally between "walking in flesh" and "walking (and waging war) according to flesh". "Walk" is commonly used in Greek to refer to the way we live; the "flesh" can refer to our physical existence in a neutral way, as in the beginning of v3, but is more often used negatively, in contrast to living according to God's spirit (see Rom 8:3-13, where "flesh" occurs 13 times; NIV translates as "sinful nature"). Paul's view of how we should live in the flesh was based on Jesus' example at the cross: he was willing to suffer, even die, looking forward to the world to



come. It appears that Paul's opponents did not share this view, and they opposed the "knowledge of God" which Paul preached (1 Cor 1:21-23; 2:2).

The battle we face is spiritual; the fortresses are pride and disobedience (in ourselves and in others). The writing of 2 Corinthians was part of Paul's battle against false teaching in the church; his weapons were argumentation and persuasion (2 Cor 5:11). Note that Paul was not trying to get the Corinthians to submit to him, but to God. The reference to punishment in v6 probably refers to church discipline, which Paul would exercise against the unrepentant on his 3rd visit (see 13:1-2). He appears to be waiting for the church's support to do this ("once your obedience is complete").

## 2 Cor 10:7-11 — The Use of Authority

Thu 14 Nov

- What authority did Paul and the other apostles have? Who gave it to them? What was Paul authorised to do?
- Why was Paul unwilling to appeal to his authority?
- Why were people unsure of Paul's authority (compare verses 10 and 7)? What type of outward things were people looking at?
- How do you recognise if someone is speaking or writing with God's authority?

### Further Notes

"We belong to Christ" (v7) could mean "we are Christians too" (Rom 8:9), but it probably means something stronger, such as being an apostle (1 Cor 1:12; 2 Cor 11:13,23). Paul's authority as an apostle was clear from the fact that he had established the church in Corinth (1 Cor 9:1-2). In contrast, his opponents were destroying the church, and this was clearly not sanctioned by God. Note that Paul was not authoritative or forceful, nor was he an impressive speaker (1 Cor 2:1,3). He worked as a slave (2 Cor 4:5), he was not paid by the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:7), and he made a fool of himself (1 Cor 4:9-10; 2 Cor 11:1). This confused people who were thinking from a worldly perspective and expecting to see a successful, strong leader. See 1 Cor 1:18-29 for a defense of the "foolishness" of the message of the cross.

## 2 Cor 10:12-18 — Comparing Ourselves with Others

Fri 15 Nov

- What are the dangers in comparing yourself with others (v12)?
- How should we measure ourselves? Or should we not try to measure ourselves at all?
- What about boasting? When is it acceptable to boast? What does it mean to "boast in the Lord"? Does it just mean instead of saying "I have ... (a great job / great kids / a new Ferrari)" we say: "God blessed me with ..."? (See Jer 9:23-24.)
- If not, what was Paul boasting about in verses 13-16?

### Further Notes

Paul wanted the Corinthian church to listen to him, but he knew it was futile to try to prove to them that he was somehow better than the rival "apostles" who were leading the church astray. His view of apostleship (see 1 Cor 4:9-13) did not leave much room for boasting on worldly grounds! But the next verses outline his sphere of influence, areas where he had established churches where there had been none before, which included Corinth. God had called Paul to perform this task (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1), and the apostles in Jerusalem acknowledged this fact (Gal 2:7-9), so he pointed out what God had done through him in spreading the gospel (Rom 15:15-20) as undeniable proof of his apostleship (1 Cor 9:1-2).

Verse 17 is not an exact quotation, but it summarises Jer 9:23-24, where we are told not to boast in wisdom, strength or riches, but in knowing and understanding God. So there is a right type of boasting: when we give glory to God rather than ourselves. In verse 18, “approved” is referring to God’s approval (1 Cor 11:19; 2 Cor 13:7), not human approval or self-commendation (2 Cor 3:1; 5:12). God approves of those who spread the true gospel by their message (cf 2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:8-10) and life (2 Cor 4:10).

## 2 Cor 11:1-15 — False Apostles

Mon 18 Nov

- What do you think “simplicity and purity” (v3, NASB) or “sincere and pure devotion” (NIV) look like? To what extent would you say your own faith matches this description?
- Why would a Christian accept another Jesus or another gospel? Do you think you could be deceived? How can you best protect yourself from this danger?
- Why did Paul refuse support from Corinth (v12)? Do you think he anticipated the problem he was now addressing? (Chapters 1, 3 and 9 of 1 Corinthians suggest that the problem was not a new one.)
- Consider verses 13-15. What do you imagine the “false apostles” were like? What was the difference between the true and false apostles? Do you think something similar could happen to us today? How would you distinguish genuine from false leaders?

### Further Notes

Proverbs 26:4-5 gives two contradictory pieces of advice about how to respond to a fool, leading to the conclusion that whether you answer foolishness or not, you can’t win. Paul found himself in such a no-win situation in Corinth: some people had come into the church boasting about their qualifications as apostles, and they had won considerable support. Paul wanted to challenge their position, but if he boasted he was being foolish like they were, and if he didn’t, their boast of superior qualifications would remain unchallenged, undermining Paul’s position. In this case he chose to answer the foolishness, but at the same time he made it very clear that his arguments were foolish (11:17,21; 12:11), even insane (11:23).

The metaphor of the church as bride appears throughout the Bible (e.g. Is 54:5-6; Eph 5:23; Rev 19:7; 21:2). We owe our allegiance and faithfulness to Christ. In verse 2, Paul’s concern was not that the church was forsaking him, but that they were being unfaithful to God. As a father to the Corinthian church (1 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 12:14), Paul was concerned to present them to Christ as a faithful bride.

The “different gospel” (v4) could have been due to Judaisers, who required their converts to be circumcised (see Gal 1:6-9; 5:4), but the “different Jesus” was probably one who is not Lord (2 Cor 4:5; 5:16). “Those super-apostles” (v5, NIV) could be a sarcastic reference to Paul’s opponents, but it is better translated “the most eminent apostles” (NASB), which suggests he was comparing himself with the leading apostles, Peter, James and John (as in Gal 2:6-9). It seems unlikely that Paul would compare himself in this way with people he considered to be servants of Satan (v13-15). Paul was not a skilled speaker (1 Cor 2:3-4; 2 Cor 10:10) but the content of his message (knowledge of God) was more important than the way it was presented.

Paul did not use his right to financial support from the church (1 Cor 9:4-18) but preferred to follow Jesus’ example of suffering (2 Cor 4:12; 6:10; 8:9), thus demonstrating the authenticity of his love and message.

The false apostles were compared to Satan (v3,14,15), leaving no doubt as to Paul’s view of the true origin of the opposition. The mention of judgement according to deeds (v15; cf 2 Cor 5:10) suggests some moral failure on the part of the false apostles, which fits with the view that they were not submitting to Jesus as Lord.

- What type of people were the false apostles (v20)?
- What type of leader was Paul by comparison?
- How do you know that Paul was a genuine apostle? What evidence would you give in his defense? What did Paul use to argue that he was a servant of Christ?
- Do you evaluate people by their achievements (even “spiritual” achievements), or by the way in which they serve?

**Further Notes**

Paul took on the role of a “fool” by boasting in order to get his point across to the Corinthians, who were judging the apostles by worldly standards (2 Cor 12:11). At the same time, he made it clear that this was no way for Christians to speak or write. In v19, he addressed with sarcasm the Corinthians’ pride in their own wisdom, as in 1 Cor 4:10. Note that it is not the false apostles but the church whom he challenged in v20: he reproved the church for allowing themselves to be enslaved (see also Gal 2:4; 5:1) and exploited by the false apostles. It appears that these false apostles had a style of leadership condemned by Jesus: devouring others (Mk 12:40) and exalting themselves (Lk 14:11; 18:14) instead of being slaves to the church (Mt 23:11; Lk 22:26) as Paul was (2 Cor 4:5). From v22, it is probable that the false apostles were stressing their Jewish background as if they were superior to Gentiles or to Jews who did not speak Hebrew (cf Acts 6:1).

Starting in v23, Paul spoke “as if insane”: he began to argue that he served Jesus more than the false apostles. But then he turned the argument on its head. Rather than boasting about how many people he had converted or how many churches he had established (which he could have argued, since his record was quite impressive by our standards), Paul described his sufferings and weaknesses, which had driven him to rely entirely on God. Anything good that came out of these situations could only be due to God’s power (2 Cor 1:8-12).

Paul was whipped (Deut 25:2-3) and stoned (Acts 14:19) by the Jews, and beaten with rods by the Romans (Acts 16:22), but he continued to reach out to them. He suffered hard work (Acts 18:3), sleeplessness (1 Th 2:9; 2 Th 3:8), hunger and cold, perhaps partly due to lack of support from the church. Paul felt responsible for the church (v28), but he did not try to coerce them (2 Cor 1:24). In v29, “weak” could refer to weakness in faith (Rom 14:1-2; 1 Cor 8:11-12; 9:22), or, more likely, physical weakness (2 Cor 12:10; 13:4).

**Introduction to 2 Cor 11:30–13:17**

Imagine you meet someone and help them to become a Christian, spending weeks and months getting to know them, sharing your life and time with them and giving your heart to the relationship. The person goes off on a trip and when they come back have changed their view of you and everything they learned about being a Christian. They don’t want to meet up, or talk to you, and no longer trust you. How would you feel and how could you respond?

From chapter 10 onwards there is a clear change in the letter to focus on Paul’s critics (he calls them “false apostles”) and Paul’s responses to their criticisms. The critics sought to undermine Paul’s authority as an apostle and thus both his teachings and relationship with the church. This was a very serious matter – the Corinthian church was beginning to reject the original gospel of Jesus (11:4) and replace it with false teaching, simultaneously rejecting any direction and guidance from Paul. Paul needed to regain their trust so he could correct their understanding. He had to do this carefully, challenging the false teachers and their teaching, and at the same time winning back the confidence of the church.

Paul continues the theme of boasting and moves on to contrast it with weakness. He shows how human boasting has no place in God's kingdom and how God is able to use trials to teach us the supremacy of grace in our lives.

- Why did Paul include the experience of escaping from Damascus in his description of boasting?
- How do you feel about sharing situations, actions or thoughts that show your weaknesses?
- How does sharing our weaknesses allow us and others to see God working in our lives?
- Does Paul want the Corinthians to be impressed by the description of the man caught up to paradise? If not, why does he include it?
- We don't know what the "thorn in the flesh" was. Why did God allow Paul to have it?
- What lesson did Paul learn from the whole episode of the revelations, his reaction to receiving them (v7) and the thorn in the flesh?
- Do you have a "thorn in the flesh" that you want God to remove, but which is still there? Do you believe that "His grace is sufficient for me" (v9)?
- Which brought Paul closer to God: the revelation or the thorn in his flesh?

### Further Notes

2 Cor 11:30-32 refers to Acts 9:23-25, soon after Paul's conversion. Instead of boldly leaving Damascus as a new Christian, he had to flee the Jews in a basket, relying on God to rescue him where he was unable to do so himself.

The man in 2 Cor 12:1-5 is Paul himself. Paul shows that as a true apostle he had received revelation directly from God, something his critics had denied. He includes the account to validate his credentials as an apostle, but also to point out that boasting of such revelations is wrong (v6). Receiving the revelations tempted him to be conceited (v7), which explains why God sent the "thorn in the flesh". The clear point of this account is that boasting and conceit are sinful and damaging, whereas weakness and finding strength in God's grace are powerful and sufficient.

The "third heaven" (v2) never appears anywhere else in the Bible, so we can only speculate as to what it means. Some Jewish Rabbis believed heaven had different levels, thus Paul's point is that he reached the highest level. Although Paul keeps the content of the revelation secret, it must have been awe-inspiring to the Corinthians, as Paul uses the experience as an argument against his critics. It was important for the Corinthians to know about Paul's experiences, but they were not important to Paul, as he did not want anyone "to think of me more than is warranted" (v6).

"In or out of the body"? "Paul says twice that he does not know whether he was in or out of the body when he was 'caught up.' This may be significant in that a Greek or Roman would naturally think of such experiences as occurring out of the body, because of their dualistic understanding of the human person and because they did not usually regard the body as having any religious or eternal importance" (B. Witherington). For Paul, however, the distinction was not significant.

"Paradise" (also mentioned in Lk 23:43; Rev 2:7) is literally "an enclosed garden". We don't know whether "the third heaven" and "paradise" are meant to be two separate places or two words for the same place.

The "thorn in the flesh" (v7): We don't know what this refers to, though Biblical scholars have proposed suggestions: "Some see it mainly as spiritual harassment. Others think it was persecution. Many suggest that it was a physical or mental ailment. Some say this was Paul's struggle with lustful and sinful thoughts" (D. Guzik). Paul considered this as being "a messenger from Satan", yet we also see from v8-9 that God had allowed the thorn's continued presence despite Paul's intense prayers for it to be removed. Paul was tempted to be proud of the revelation, so the "thorn in the flesh" was given. Ultimately, God allowed the thorn to teach Paul that Christ's power was most apparent during difficult times ("weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties"). Similarly, when faced with our own difficult times, we can pray for those difficulties to be removed, but it may be that God wants us to accept them and instead focus on His grace. The point here is that we need to dig deep and really understand grace in order to overcome the trials that we face.

## 2 Cor 12:11-19 — Vulnerability in Relationships

Thu 21 Nov

In this section Paul concludes his “fool” argument (started in 10:1) and explains why he had never received financial support from the Corinthian church. The way he writes reveals his compassion and love for the church, as he writes from the perspective of a spiritual father to his children.

- In what ways does Paul reason with the church that he is just as much an apostle as his critics?
- Try to read the text and imagine that you are the “you” referred to in these verses. How would you feel, receiving such comments?
- How does Paul show his heart and depth of emotion to the Corinthians?
- What does it mean for you to “gladly spend for someone everything I have and expend myself as well” (v15)?
- What can you do today to “gladly spend” for someone in church?

### Further Notes

Verses 11-13 are a series of short challenges to the Corinthians. Paul had not wanted to boast about achievements (his “fool” speech) but felt that the lack of spiritual support from the Corinthians against his critics had given him no option. He reminds them that he had done signs, wonders and miracles among them, thus displaying his credentials as a true Spirit-inspired apostle. He wanted them to know that they had never been less favoured than other churches, except in one respect – they had never given him financial support. His critics had used this fact against him, and in verses 17-18 Paul uses sarcasm as he challenges them directly with two similar questions: “Did I exploit you?” and “Titus did not exploit you, did he?” (to which the answer is surely “no”). He uses these questions to help the church see the error of the false apostles’ criticisms.

Verse 14: “third time visit”: Acts 18:11 records the original visit when the church was founded; the second visit was a brief, painful experience between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Paul now announces a third visit.

Verses 14-15 reveal Paul’s deep compassion for the church, where he describes their relationship as like that of a father and his children. He is very vulnerable as he asks “If I love you more, will you love me less” (v15)? He is willing to spend not just money on them, but his own life. Though we can see the pain Paul feels as he writes these words, he does not stop loving the church because of the criticism they have allowed him to receive. We may be tempted to pull back if someone criticises us but Paul, like Jesus, does not pull back.

Verse 16: “I caught you by trickery”. Paul is using sarcasm to defend himself against critics who appear to have criticised him for requesting the contribution for the Jerusalem churches. The critics may have suggested that Paul would use the contribution for himself, which Paul denies. In verse 19 Paul explains that his letter was not to defend himself but to strengthen the church. In other words, he didn’t need to boast about his achievements to make himself feel good, but to expose the false apostles and win the church back to allegiance to himself and the true gospel.

## 2 Cor 12:20-13:7 — Examine Yourself

Fri 22 Nov

Paul shifts the focus away from defending and reasoning to challenging the Corinthians’ hearts. He does not want them to miss the sobering truth that they need to repent of the sins he had challenged them on earlier. The Corinthians had got so distracted listening to the critics that they had gone soft on their own righteousness - Paul sharply wakes them up to this.

- What does Paul fear about the church’s attitude to sin?
- How does Paul feel about such sin?
- How do you respond to sin in your own or other disciples’ lives?
- What do you think Paul means in 13:2 when he says “I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others”?

- In 13:3, how is Christ's power linked to Paul's speech?
- How should we "examine ourselves ... test ourselves"? What does it mean to "fail the test"?

### Further Notes

12:20 is a sin list basically describing factions, cliques or groups, whereas 12:21 is a list of sexual sins. In 1 Cor both these types of sins were challenged. Paul fears the church has not repented of these sins. However, chapter 7 describes repentance, suggesting that some people had repented of some sins whilst others had not.

In 13:1, Paul refers to Dt 19:15, where the law stipulates that accusations must be supported by 2 or 3 witnesses. Jesus used the same principle in Mt 18:16 and Jn 8:17. Here are two possible explanations as to why this reference is included: (i) To warn the Corinthians that if they intended to accuse Paul, they would need several witnesses. (ii) Alternatively, Paul may have been looking ahead to his next visit where he expected the church to come to him with many claims and accusations against one another, where the validity of the accusations would depend on having several witnesses.

In 13:2-3, Paul warns them that he will indeed "prove" his apostleship when he visits, but this will be through dealing with their sin, not through signs and miracles. He had been criticised for being weak – he warned them that he would rebuke unrepented sin in God's power.

The challenge to "examine yourselves" in v5 is in contrast to the criticisms the Corinthians had made of Paul's apostleship. Paul directs them to examine their own faith, reasoning in v6 that if they conclude that they are Christians, they will then conclude that as their spiritual father, he too is a true Christian and apostle. However, the sobering truth is that they may "fail the test", i.e. not be right with God.

## 2 Cor 13:8-14 — Build One Another Up

Mon 25 Nov

Paul concludes the letter by reminding the church of his motive for the challenges he has given them. He wants them to be restored to God by repenting before he visits them, as it will be painful for them (and him) if they have not repented.

- Why does Paul challenge the church according to verses 8-10?
- In v10 Paul understands that the Lord has given him authority - what do we learn from this verse about how Paul wanted to use his authority?
- How do you feel about spiritual authority in the church? Why does God give some people authority in the church?
- What is the general tone of these final verses – is it one of rebuke or encouragement?
- How does Paul sum up the letter in v11?
- In what ways can you "aim for perfection" whilst living in "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ"?

### Further Notes

The final remarks in v11 ("Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace") refer back to the issues of unity and relationships seen in 1 Corinthians (e.g. 1 Cor 3:3). V12 continues the focus on being a family – "Greet one another with a holy kiss". Even v14, where Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit are mentioned, points to the trinity working harmoniously together, another subtle encouragement that the Corinthians do likewise. "Greet one another with a holy kiss": "The idea of greeting one another with a holy kiss was common in that ancient culture. Our cultural equivalent is a handshake or a hug and a warm greeting" (D. Guzik).

# Epilogue

We started 2 Corinthians explaining that the occasion of the letter was for:

- Paul's joyful thanksgiving for the repentance of the church
- Paul's renewing their pledge and preparation for benevolent aid / financial giving
- Paul's defence of his apostleship

Is there evidence that the defence and appeals were successful and that Paul and the Corinthians were reconciled? Acts 20:2-3 records that Paul was later in Greece for 3 months and Paul's letter to the Romans appears to have been written from Corinth. If that is so, the letter was a success and they were reconciled.

2 Corinthians helps us to see how Paul attempted reconciliation. We too must do everything we can to ensure that we remain reconciled with God and one another, and that we help non-Christians to be reconciled to God.

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