

2 Corinthians

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Author The letter is from *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother*.1:1.

Written to 2 Corinthians was written to *the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia*.1:2.



Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, (part of modern day Greece). It stands on a narrow isthmus between the Ionian and Aegean seas and in Paul's time was a commercial and industrial center with a population of around 700,000.

The Greek city of Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC and rebuilt in 46 BC by Julius Caesar. The city was dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility. Corinth was a very corrupt and immoral place so its people desperately needed to hear the gospel.

Background Paul visited Corinth during his second missionary journey between AD 50-52. He stayed with Priscilla and Aquila and made his living as a tentmaker. Paul preached the gospel every Sabbath in the synagogue but his work was strongly opposed by the Jews, even to the point of taking him to court. Paul then decided to concentrate on bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. A thriving church was soon established, which was remarkable as Corinth was a highly pagan Roman city. Paul stayed on in Corinth for 18 months teaching the new Christians, before returning to Jerusalem. See Acts Chapter 18. The Corinthian church soon developed a number of serious troubles so Paul wrote the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians to address specific issues which had arisen in the church.

Date and situation 1 Corinthians was probably written in Ephesus around AD 56 when Paul was near the end of his third missionary journey. He had written an earlier letter to the church at Corinth, but it has since been lost. See 1 Corinthians 5:9-11. Further issues arose in the Corinthian church after Paul wrote these letters so he made a quick trip across the Aegean to try to sort them out. This became a *painful visit* 2:1, and Paul could not resolve the issue due to opposition of a leader in the church (likely someone bearing letters of recommendation from Jerusalem 3:1). Paul returned to Ephesus and from there wrote a further letter out of *great distress and anguish of heart* 2:4; 7:8,12. This letter (which has also been lost) resulted in the leader being removed and the church repenting. Meanwhile the situation in Ephesus erupted and Paul *despaired even of life*. 1:8,9; Acts 19:23-41. He was able to escape from Ephesus in a miraculous way and travelled north to Troas wanting to hear news about what had happened in Corinth. Not hearing anything he sailed to Philippi where he met Titus, who explained the change of heart in Corinth.

2 Corinthians was probably written in AD 57. Paul wrote chapters 1-7 in response to all that had been going on, and chapters 8-9 to prepare the Corinthians for an upcoming visit. Later Paul received further news from Corinth that opposition towards him had been renewed and he wrote chapters 10-13 in defense of his ministry. He followed up the letter with a visit later in the year, Acts 20:2-3, but we don't know the response to 2 Corinthians or the outcome of this final visit.

Type

Letter to a church. The introduction shows that the letter is not just for the Corinthian church, but for a wide group of Christians. Some of the letter is personal and directed to the Corinthians and some is more general making it just as relevant today as it was in the first century. Some think 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4 and Chapters 10-13 may have been separate letters, later combined into one.

Purpose

Paul has two main purposes in the first section of 2 Corinthians.(Chapters 1-9). The first is to validate his ministry after the opposition he experienced and to rebuild the relationship with the Corinthians he once had. Paul forgives those who opposed him and explains how his ministry has brought him great suffering and yet great joy. He had seen the power of God in action, which was comforting in his present dangerous situation and as he faces death he can now look forward to meeting Jesus. As he faces his future he will be greatly comforted if the good relationship he once had with the Corinthians is restored. The second purpose of this section is to make sure the collection for Jerusalem gets on track again. To achieve this Paul gives detailed teaching on Christian giving; explaining how free will giving is a response to all that God has given us in Christ.

The second section of the letter (Chapters 10-13) is a passionate defense by Paul of his ministry. He refutes those who oppose him by showing that what counts in ministry is the call of God, not oratory or popularity or background.

In both sections, Paul's love for the Corinthian church comes shining through, as does his appreciation of the relationship he once had with the Corinthian believers. As he nears the end of his life Paul is focused on restoring the unity of the church, and his former relationship with its leaders.

Key verses

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God. 2:14-17.

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 3:16-18.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. 5:16-21.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 8:9.

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9:6-8.

Outline

Greeting. 1:1-7

Paul and Timothy begin the letter with a greeting to *the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia*. As in most of Paul's letters the greeting is followed by thanksgiving – this time for comfort in the midst of suffering (a theme that is developed further in chapters 1-7). Paul has been comforted in all of his troubles by *the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort*. The suffering of Christ has flowed into his life, and now *through Christ our comfort overflows*. Paul knows that just as the Corinthians have *shared in his sufferings*, so they can also *share in his comfort*.

Paul's situation. 1:8-2:13

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know about the hardships he had experienced in Asia. He had been *under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure*. Under the *sentence of death* he had had to *rely on God* and God had delivered him. This gave Paul hope for the future, especially if the Corinthians continued to pray for him.

Paul boasted that he had conducted himself in the world and in his relationship with the Corinthians *in the holiness and sincerity that are from God, not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace*. He had planned to visit them twice and had been very upfront about this. His promises had been made with a clear conscience but he now chose not to make another *painful visit* to Corinth in order to spare them from more grief and to save himself from more distress. He had confidence in the Corinthians that they would *share his joy*, and that the letters he had written *out of great distress and anguish of heart* would show how much he loved them.

The Corinthians had responded to Paul's letter by removing the one who opposed Paul and he now says that this punishment was sufficient. The man now ought to be forgiven and comforted, and they were to reaffirm their love for him and forgive him, just as Paul had forgiven him.

Paul then tells how he went from Ephesus to Philippi, trying to hear news of how the Corinthians had responded to his letter. He had even given up an opportunity to minister in Troas so he could find Titus in Macedonia.

The next section of 2 Corinthians is a long digression in which Paul seeks to justify the validity of his ministry to the Corinthians and his apostleship as a minister of the New Covenant.

Paul's apostolic ministry. 2:14 -7:4

Paul's ministry is like the ministry of Jesus, one of much suffering and yet great glory. Paul knows that God *always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere*. Paul, himself, is *to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing*. He does not feel *equal to the task* and does not *peddle the word of God for profit*. On the contrary, in Christ he speaks *before God with sincerity, as those sent from God*. This may sound like boasting, but Paul doesn't need letters of recommendation like the one who opposed him. His validation is the Corinthians themselves: *a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the Living God*.



Paul can't claim any competence for this, because his competence comes from God who has made him a *minister of the new covenant*. The ministry of the old covenant (through Moses) came with glory but it brought condemnation and death (Romans 3:20, 7:10-12), *How much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!* Now, in Christ we have hope and the veil over our eyes has been lifted so we can see the Lord's glory. *Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Because Paul's ministry is through God's mercy he will *not lose heart* in his current circumstances, and has determined to *set forth the truth plainly* and to maintain a *clear conscience* before God. If people don't receive his gospel it is because the *god of this age has blinded them so they can't see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*. Paul is determined to *preach Jesus Christ as Lord*, not himself. God has shined His light into Paul and this *treasure* is in *jars of clay* to show that this *all-surpassing power is from God*, not from him. He is suffering greatly and is always *being given over to death for Jesus' sake* so that others may receive Jesus' life. *Death is at work in us so that life is at work in you*. His belief in the Lord is now so strong he knows that *the One who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us up with Jesus and present us with you in His presence*. This is the great hope of all Christian believers! Paul may be *wasting away outwardly*, but inwardly he is being *renewed day by day*. *The light and momentary troubles* he is experiencing are preparing for him *an eternal glory that far outweighs them all*. Would that all Christians had this same attitude as they go through life's troubles. Rather than fixing our eyes on our troubles it is much better to focus on things that are eternal.

In Chapter 5 and 6 Paul continues to justify his apostolic ministry by describing the eternal life he has proclaimed to the Corinthians and how he has been motivated by love in all that he has done. Along the way (almost as bylines) he gives some of the most wonderful truths anywhere in the Bible about the gospel and our responsibility to share it with others.

- Our body (the *earthly tent we live in*) will soon be destroyed but we will be gaining an *eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands*. Our *human mortality* will be *swallowed up with life*. God has given us the Holy Spirit as a *deposit* to guarantee this.
- While we are here on earth we are *at home in the body and away from the Lord*. We *live by faith* and *make it our goal to please Him* because one day *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*.
- We know that Christ died so that *those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him*.
- We must no longer view people from a worldly point of view. *If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old has gone and the new is here*.
- This is God's work. He has *reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them*.
- God has *committed to us the message of reconciliation* so we are *Christ's ambassadors*.
- All people need to be *reconciled to God*.
- Reconciliation with God is possible because of what Jesus did at the Cross: *God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*.
- *Now is the day of God's favour, now is the time of salvation*. We must share the gospel while we still can!
- Don't put any kind of *stumbling block in anyone's path*; rather be *servants of God* in sharing the gospel regardless of the hardships and distress this may entail. (Paul experienced extreme difficulties in his ministry but continued to serve God *regardless in purity, understanding, patience, and kindness, in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love, in truthful speech, and in the power of God*).

On the basis of all this Paul asks the Corinthians to *open wide* their hearts to him.

Paul now digresses slightly by reminding the Corinthians to maintain a pure relationship with God. (6:13-7:1). They are not to be *yoked together with unbelievers*. God had rescued them from idolatry so they were not to go back and partake in their old pagan lifestyle. Believers are *the temple of God* so *let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God*. Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:11, Ezekiel 20:34,41 to support this.

Picking up from 6:13, Paul asks now the Corinthians to make room in their hearts for him. He has not wronged any of them and he points out that they really do not have anything substantial against him. The letter he sent may have brought them sorrow, which he doesn't regret because *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leaves no regret*. He has been encouraged by Titus's report and has much joy as he thinks about the Corinthians. He is not criticizing them but simply appealing to them in love; and has *complete confidence* that they will respond according to his wishes.



The collection for the Church in Jerusalem. 8:1–9:15

Paul now continues in his attempt to restore good relationships with the Corinthians by dealing with the sensitive issue of the collection for the church in Jerusalem. There had been a famine throughout Judea during the 40s so this collection would provide much needed help. See Acts 11:27-30. It would also help bring about a sense of oneness between the Jewish and Gentile parts of the church.

The poor Christians in Macedonia had given towards the collection with rich generosity and Titus was about to visit Corinth to gather the collection that the Corinthians had begun the previous year. (Giving for the collection had probably been affected by the controversy with Paul so he didn't want any criticism in the way this *liberal gift* was administered). Paul encourages them to *excel in the grace of giving*. Their giving would be a reflection of their love and be based on the example of Jesus, who *though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you, through His poverty might become rich*. This would bring about *equality* so that *those who gathered much did not have too much, and those who gathered little did not have too little*.

The Corinthians would be enriched through this giving, and would know that they were *supplying the needs of God's people* and that this would *overflow in many expressions of thanks to God*. Others would praise God for their obedience and generosity.

2 Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9 are the main places in the New Testament where there is teaching on Christian giving. The main principles that Christians should follow in their giving are as follows:

- Giving flows from God's grace towards us. 8:1
- Giving should be generous. 8:2,3, 20
- Giving is a privilege. 8:4
- Giving is more about giving of yourself, than of your money. 8:5
- Giving is not a commandment; it is a free-will response. 8:8
- Giving follows Jesus' example in which He poured out His life for others. 8:9
- Giving is 'according to your means'. 8:11
- Giving may be reciprocal. Give when you have plenty to meet others' needs; they will give when they have plenty to meet your needs. 8:13-15
- Giving is a way of serving others. It is other-centred; not self-centred. 9:1,2
- Giving is not to be done begrudgingly. 9:5
- Giving is part of the 'sowing and reaping' principle. *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* 9:6, Galatians 6:7-9, Luke 6:38.
- Giving should be planned. Everyone should decide what to give, and then give freely and generously 9:7
- *God loves a cheerful giver* so there should be no compulsion, organizational pressure, guilt trips, emotional blackmail, manipulation etc. regarding giving.
- God's grace comes to those who give. 9:8-11. (But this does not mean that we give so that we will get. That would make the motive for giving a selfish one, rather than a response to God's grace).
- Being rich gives more opportunity to be generous in giving. 9:11
- Giving meets the needs of God's people 9:12, and results in much thanksgiving to God. 9:13-15
- We belong to God. Everything that we have and are is His. *You are not your own. You have been bought with a price.* 2 Corinthians 6:9. Our giving should be a reflection of this.
- We are encouraged to set aside an amount of money on the first day of every week, in keeping with our income, so there is a fund which can be distributed to 'God's people'. No specific amount or proportion of income is required to be given. Rather we are to give in a way that recognises God's grace in blessing us. 1 Corinthians 16:1,2
- Our motive in giving is all important. We should give willingly (8:12), cheerfully (9:7), generously (9:6), and freely (9:7, Matthew 10:8).
- We can give to many causes. These include needy Christians and churches (Romans 12:13, 2 Corinthians 9:12); the sick and aged (Acts 20:35); church leaders (1 Timothy 5:17); those who teach God's Word (11:8; Galatians 6:6-10); widows (Acts 6:1,1 Timothy 5:16); the poor (1 Timothy 5:8-16), and missionaries (3 John 5-7).



A note about "tithing" as part of Christian giving.

Many churches encourage (or require) their members to "tithes" i.e. give 10% of their income to their local church. Sometimes this is seen as 'giving to God', and not doing it is seen as 'robbing God'. But is "tithing" in this way a requirement for Christians in their giving?

- There is no requirement anywhere in the New Testament to tithe anything. There is, however, a consistent focus on giving, as a response to God's grace. Any New Testament references to tithing are consistently related to a condemnation of those who were doing it legalistically. eg. Matthew 23:23, Luke 11:42, Luke 18:12
- Tithing under the Old Covenant (the Jewish Law) was always a giving of the 10th part of produce, not of money. The produce was gathered and stored in the temple storehouse so it could be used to provide for the priests (who had no allocation of land so couldn't grow produce for their food), and for the poor.
- There were three tithes:



1. The **first tithe** was to the Levites Numbers 18:21

Fruit, corn, wine, oil and flocks were tithed and taken (along with other offerings) to the sanctuaries in the Temple and priestly cities. There they were given to the Levites. Anything not eaten was kept in storehouses. If the distance to the sanctuary was too great to carry the produce it could be exchanged for silver, and the silver used to buy suitable produce to be eaten in the celebration. Deuteronomy 12:2-7; 17-19; 14:22-27. Leviticus 27:30-33. Nehemiah 10:37,38; 13:12. 2 Chronicles 31:5-12.

2. The **second tithe** was a tenth of the first tithe.

One tenth of the produce was collected by the Levites and brought to the Temple and given to the Priests. This tithe is called the 'sacred portion' and was the 'best part' of the first tithe. Numbers 18:21-32. Nehemiah 10:35-39, Malachi 3:7-12. The storehouse (Hebrew *owtsar* - store, treasure house) was a warehouse in which the second tithe was stored. Malachi revealed that the priests were keeping some of the produce for themselves and not bringing the full tenth of the second tithe to the storehouse. As a result they were 'robbing God'. God promised full barns and vats, opened windows of heaven, outpoured blessing, and deliverance from locusts, if they would obey Him. Malachi 3:8-12. Some Churches use these verses to create a new Christian 'law' in which a tenth of one's income, plus extra offerings must be given to the local church. This is unjustified, legalistic and often brings Christians into un-necessary bondage. In Malachi 3:10,11 God was rebuking Israel's priests for not bringing the full tithe into the temple storehouse, as required by the Law. These verses are totally irrelevant for Christians.

3. The **third tithe** (or the **Poor Tithe**)

Every third year the whole of the tithe was given away to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. Deuteronomy 14:28,29; 26:12-15.

- The tithing system thus created a 'bank' of produce that supported the priests and Levites and enabled all of society to benefit. It was equivalent to our taxation and social welfare systems (and relevant for a society led by priests, rather than by a government). These tithes have no relevance for Christians as we are not under the Old Testament Law. With the introduction of taxes (under the Roman government) and the destruction of the Temple in AD70 there was no need for the tithing system and it died out.
- By New Testament times the Pharisees had become legalistic about tithing (as they did about most other matters of Jewish law). Jesus was very critical of this. In Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42, Jesus criticised the Pharisees for tithing three small garden herbs while neglecting three "weightier matters of the law", namely, justice, mercy, and faith. In Luke 18:12, He denounced a Pharisee who congratulated himself for his virtues, including tithing, but did not value humility and repentance.
- Early Christian leaders (like Paul) financed themselves by working and were proud of the fact that they didn't make demands on their followers. 2 Corinthians 11:7, Acts 18:3, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12.
- Christians must pay all required taxes. Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7.
- Under the New Covenant Christian giving is not under law, rather it is a free and joyful response to God's grace! We are *no longer under law but under grace*. Romans 6:14

The practice of tithing (of money, rather than produce) entered the Church about 500 years after Christ, and was focused on financing the Church institution: *"As the Church expanded and various institutions arose, it became necessary to make laws which would insure the proper and permanent support of the clergy. The payment of tithes was adopted from the Old Law... The earliest positive legislation on the subject seems to be contained in the letter of the bishops assembled at Tours in 567 and the [canons] of the Council of Macon in 585."* - The Catholic Encyclopedia. This enshrined the tithe into ecclesiastical Law, and in some countries into national Law through a church tax. These practices still take place in some countries although, these days, they are often more focused on paying rentals for land. Some Protestant churches also follow the practice, even though the so called "tithing" they require is nothing like the practice of tithing in the Bible.

Giving under the New Covenant is nothing like the Old Testament legal system. We now live not under Law, but under grace. To require Christians to give certain amounts or in certain ways is to revert to a legalism, that we have been set free from, in Christ. 1 Peter 2:16, John 8:36. If churches try to enforce giving e.g. by demanding that people "tithe" they are stopping their people from growing spiritually and hindering a genuine partnership with Christ in giving by grace. Giving that is reluctant or coerced does not please God, for *God loves a cheerful giver*. 9:7 If you want to give 10% of your income to your local church you are free to do so, but there is no scriptural requirement for this.



God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Cor 9:8

Paul's defense of his ministry. 10:1 - 13:14.

The *timid* Paul now becomes rather *bold* in the defense of his ministry. His apostleship has been attacked and though he does not *wage war as the world does*, he is now ready to *punish every act of disobedience* until the Corinthians' *obedience is complete*. He reminds them that he *belongs to Christ just as much* as they do, but he does not want to *commend* himself as some others have done. His boast is not about *work already done*, rather in what still can be done. *Let those who boast, boast in the Lord. For it is not those who commend themselves who are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.*

Paul has promised the Corinthians *to Christ* and is concerned that they have been *led astray* by a *different gospel* preached by the "super-apostles". In contrast to them he has served the Corinthians selflessly by providing his gospel *free of charge* and by making sure he was not a burden to them. The false apostles are *deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*

The Corinthian's behavior was serious enough for Paul to then boast about his life and ministry, ridiculous as he felt such an exercise was. He has had *visions and revelations from the Lord*, and his experiences are in every way superior to the false apostles – including the many ways he has suffered for Christ. He doesn't want to boast about all this but prefers to boast about his weaknesses. He has had revelations of heaven and now has a *thorn in his flesh* – a *messenger from Satan* that tormented him to keep him from *becoming conceited*. The Lord said to him *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" Therefore he could *boast all the more gladly* about his weaknesses, *so that Christ's power* may rest on him. He could even *delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Paul felt that he was at least the equal of the "super-apostles" and that his apostleship had been validated *by the things that mark an apostle: signs, wonders and miracles*. He is now ready to visit the Corinthians a third time, and, once again, will not be a burden to them but will give himself freely to them. *I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well.*

Paul brings this section to a close by asking *Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves?* If so, he reminds the Corinthians that he has been speaking *in the sight of God*, and everything he has done has been for their *strengthening*. When he comes he doesn't want to find the Corinthians are still indulging in the sinful practices they had repented of. He had warned them last time he was with them and now strongly repeats his warning: *I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others.*

Therefore, the Corinthians needed to examine themselves to see whether they were *in the faith* and whether Christ was in them, or not. Paul was not concerned about himself or his position; and his prayer was for their *perfection*. He was happy to be seen as *weak* if they were *following the truth*. He didn't want to be harsh in his use of authority – the authority *given to him by the Lord for building you up, not for tearing you down.*

Paul finishes the letter by farewelling the Corinthians and reminding them to *Aim for perfection; listen to my appeal; be of one mind; live in peace. And the God of love will be with you.*

He sends greetings from all the saints and ends with the famous benediction: *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Paul's thorn in the flesh

Some think Paul's thorn in the flesh may have been poor eyesight. Evidence for this is:

- He used others to write his letters for him and just wrote a final greeting in his own handwriting, sometimes with large print. Romans 16:22; 1 Corinthians 16:21; 2 Thessalonians 3:17; Galatians 6:11.
- He says that the Galatian Church would have torn out their eyes and given them to him if it were possible. Galatians 4:15.
- He didn't see the High priest clearly when addressing the Sanhedrin. Acts 23:3-5.

Paul pleaded with the Lord *three times* to take away the thorn in his flesh and finally came to terms with it. He realized that *God's power was made perfect in weakness*, and in Christ, *when I am weak, then I am strong*. Paul's attitude towards difficulties in his life is an inspiration to all Christians as they endure hardships.



Discussion questions

Why did Paul write 2 Corinthians?

Paul is often seen as a great Christian teacher and leader. In 2 Corinthians he reveals much more of his humanity than he does in most of his other letters. Identify the leadership qualities Paul demonstrates in the letter and then contrast them with the human characteristics he reveals.

How was the situation of the church in Corinth similar to and different from the situation facing the church today? How is the message of 2 Corinthians relevant for the church today?

Describe the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians. What were its good points and bad points? How had the relationship changed over time? What techniques did Paul use to try to improve the relationship? How can you use these techniques in your personal relationships?

Identify aspects of the gospel described in Chapters 5 and 6. What is our responsibility to share the gospel with others? How well do you understand the gospel? How free are you in sharing the gospel with others? How effective are you in sharing the gospel with others?

What principles guide your Christian giving? Are you a cheerful giver?

What have you learned from your study of 2 Corinthians? How will you apply this in the future?