

2 Corinthians

Listed Scriptures

2 Corinthians

Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn about the joys, frustrations, responsibilities, and authorities of a minister through Paul's experience in 2 Corinthians.
- 2) To encourage students to pray for our ministers and joyfully give to God's work.

Memory Verse

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Cor 5:17)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

2 Cor 1-13

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D

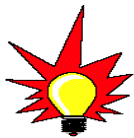


1 Corinthians seemed to make an impact upon the Corinthian church, as Paul never again mentions lawsuits among believers (1 Cor 6:1-8) or disorderly conduct during the Lord's Supper (1 Cor.11:11-34). However, after 1 Corinthians was delivered, news came back to Paul that false teachers (Jewish-Christian missionaries) had arrived in Corinth and were trying to undo his character and teachings. Paul immediately put off his work in Ephesus and rushed to Corinth. This visit was known as the "painful visit" in which Paul was grieved (2 Cor 2:1, 12:14, 21, 13:1-2).

After returning to Ephesus, Paul was openly insulted at Corinth (2 Cor 2:5-8). This prompted him to write the "severe letter" (2 Cor 2:4), now lost, which was penned

in Ephesus and delivered by Titus (7:5-16). Later, Paul had to leave Ephesus due to the riot instigated by Demetrius (Acts 19:23–20:1). He evangelized at Troas and traveled to Macedonia. It was there that Titus brought the good news that the Corinthians had responded to the “severe letter” by reforming their ways (2 Cor 7:5-16). Therefore, Paul wrote chapters 1–9 of 2 Corinthians to express his relief and joy and encourage the collection of offerings for the church in Jerusalem. After hearing further problems at Corinth, he wrote chapters 10–13 and sent the letter to Corinth via Titus (8:16-24). Paul then traveled to Corinth (12:14; 13:1, 2). This third visit (56 AD) was a success, as the Corinthians willingly participated in the Jerusalem offering (Rom 15:26). It was during this stay that Paul wrote the book of Romans. (Please also refer to lesson 2 for additional information regarding the history of Corinth.)

W A R M U P



What does the term “apostle” mean? (one that is “sent”) What is the modern-day equivalent of an apostle? Do apostles have to be full-time ordained ministers? Or are we all apostles? What kind of responsibilities does an apostle have? From Paul’s writing in 2 Corinthians, we can learn about the joys, trials, frustrations, and comfort of a first century apostle. As we study Paul’s experiences, let us be reminded of our own apostleship and the apostleship of our modern-day preachers. Let us determine to participate in God’s ministries and pray for His workers.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Overview

2 Corinthians is Paul’s introduction and defense of his apostleship. There are three main purposes to the letter: 1) To counter accusations by false apostles about Paul’s character, 2) To encourage the church to strive for spiritual growth and participate in the ministry of God, 3) To defend Paul’s authority as an apostle so that his ministry may not be shamed. Through 2 Corinthians, we can see Paul’s joys and frustrations as a missionary-apostle, the diligent fulfillment of his apostolic role, and his genuine heart to serve and help the Corinthian believers.

Part 1. The Heart of an Apostle (Ch 1–5)

- A. Paul’s character (1–2)
- B. Paul’s ministry (3–4)
- C. Paul’s motivations (5)

Part 2. The Hopes of an Apostle (Ch 6–9)

- A. Hope that believers are separate and holy (6)
- B. Hope that believers grow in spirit (7)
- C. Hope that believers may joyfully give (8–9)

Part 3. The Authority of a Minister (Ch 10–13)

- A. Purpose of Paul’s authority (10)
- B. Defense of Paul’s authority (11)
- C. Plans for Paul’s third visit (12:14–13:14)



Part 2

The Heart of an Apostle (Ch 1-5)



A. Paul’s Character (1-2)

- a. Thankful (1:1-11)
As an apostle, Paul regularly encountered many trials and afflictions. These experiences of tribulation taught him to have hope through faith. Therefore, he is able to comfort believers undergoing trials and teach them to give thanks in all circumstances.
- b. Pure in heart (1:12-24)
When accused of fickle-mindedness (for changing his plans to visit Corinth), Paul’s only defense was a clear conscience. God could witness that he did all things out of purity and honesty.
- c. Forgiving (2:1-11)
Out of love, Paul urges the church to forgive and embrace the one who had offended him. This person who had caused Paul grief was not the incestuous brother (1 Cor 5), but a person who had openly spoken out against Paul.
- d. Committed (2:12-17)
Paul wore and diffused the fragrance of Christ. No matter where he went, he spread the gospel, edified the church, and glorified the Lord.

Teacher’s Note: The Fragrance of Life & Death (2:16)

Here, Paul uses imagery of a Roman triumphal procession to describe the fragrance of Christ. In such a procession, priests would walk behind the captives, swinging incense-filled censers. To the victors, the scent and perfume from the censers would be the perfume of joy, triumph and life. To the captives who walked a short distance ahead, it was the perfume of death, which signaled their coming execution. Here Paul compared himself and his fellow workers to walking in a procession, preaching the gospel of the triumphant Jesus Christ (the victorious General). To those who accept the Gospel, the scent is the aroma of life, as it was to the victors of the procession; and to those who reject it, it is the aroma of death, as it was to the captives.

B. Paul's Ministry (3-4)

- a. God-given (3:1-11)
God's power could be seen in the faith and transformation of the Corinthian members. The Corinthian church was a letter of recommendation that proved that Paul's ministry came from God.
- b. Honest (4:1-6)
Paul renounced craftiness, was careful to not misrepresent God's word, and spoke only of the truth of Christ.
- c. Self-sacrificing (4:7-12)
Paul saw himself as a humble earthen vessel that carried the treasure of the gospel. For the sake of the gospel, he was willing to be hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. Because of such suffering, the life of Jesus was manifested in Paul's life and ministry.
- d. Lifelong (4:13-18)
Paul dedicated his life to God because he felt that his suffering for God was light in comparison to the weight of eternal glory. This perspective allowed him to focus on the spiritual and eternal (things that are not seen).

C. Paul's Motivations (5)

- a. Confident in eternal hope (5:1-10)
A tent can be quickly set up and taken down. It is temporary and offers no permanence. Paul believed that life on earth was like a tent—brief, short and painful. As long as he was at home in the body, he was absent from God. Therefore, he focused on the eternal building in heaven, aimed to please God, and encouraged believers to do likewise.
- b. Compelled by the love of Christ (5:11-21)

Before his conversion, Paul misjudged Christ by the flesh. Afterwards, Paul realized that the blameless Christ had died for all of mankind's sins. Compelled by such love, Paul became an ambassador for Christ, reconciling man to God. Here, Paul implores us to not judge anyone by the flesh but join the ministry of reconciliation.



Part 3

The Hopes of an Apostle (Ch 6-9)



A. Hope That Believers Be Separate and Holy (6)

- a. Believers are God's ministers (6:1-10)
Paul hopes the believers will not receive the grace of God in vain. They ought to suffer for Christ and be cautious in their conduct so that the ministry of God may not be blamed.
- b. Believers are children of God (6:11-18)
Followers of Christ cannot be yoked together with the spiritually dark and lawless. Paul reminds the believers that they are the temples of the living God and Christ lives in them. If they come out from among the gentiles and avoid the unclean, they will be called the sons and daughters of God.



B. Hope That Believers Grow in Spirit (7)

- a. Speaking the truth in love (7:1-4)
Paul loved the Corinthian believers so much that he was willing to live and die with them. This love prompted him to speak boldly concerning the believers' wrongdoings and risk offending them.
- b. A preacher's comfort (7:5-16)
Titus confirmed that the believers had heeded Paul's warning and repented with godly sorrow. The spiritual growth of the Corinthian believers brought much comfort to Paul even though he was facing many of his own trials at the time.



C. Hope That Believers May Joyfully Give (8-9)

- a. The Macedonian example (8:1-15)
Paul uses the example of the Macedonian church's generous free-will offering to encourage the Corinthian church to do the same. He hopes that the believers can participate in the grace of God and have part in the fellowship of min-

- istering to the saints.
- b. Showing hospitality to workers (8:16-24)
Paul urges the church to show love and hospitality to Titus and the brothers sent to collect the Jerusalem offering. He affirms their diligence, work ethic, good reputation, and their role as faithful messengers.
 - c. The fruits of offering (9:1-15)
Sometimes it's not enough to merely think about offering our wealth, time, or talents. Here, Paul praises the church's willingness but encourages them to prepare their offering lest they fail to live up to their promises. He also reminds them that those who give generously will receive generously from the Lord. They will cause others to feel the warmth of brethren, be encouraged by faith, and glorify God.

Teacher's Note: The Jerusalem Offering—Why was it important? There were several reasons why Jewish Christians in Jerusalem needed help from the gentile churches: (1) After converting to Christianity, Jews in Jerusalem may have been "punished" by losing their social and economic status. (2) Communal sharing in Acts 2:44-45, 4:32, 34-35 may have deepened the poverty of the Jews. (3) There was a famine in 46 AD (Acts 11:27-30), exacerbating food shortages and overpopulation in Palestine. (4) As the "mother church," the Jerusalem church supported a large number of teachers and visitors. (5) Palestinian Jews were double taxed by both Jews and Romans. Therefore, during 52-57 AD, Paul spent much effort to collect an offering for the "poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Rom 15:16). The offering was not only an act of brotherly love, but represented unity of Jews and gentiles in Christ. (Paraphrased from the *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, 1994, Volume 2, p. 661-2)



Part 4

The Authority of a Minister (Ch 10-13)



A. The Purpose of Paul's Authority (10)

- a. To edify the believers (10:1-11)
Some believers accused Paul of using worldly methods and motives in preaching. They criticized him for being bold in writing but weak in person. Paul reminds them that he does not war according to the flesh. His apostolic authority is given by God for the believers' edification. He has the authority to be

"bold," but hopes to avoid exercising his authority and correct unrepentant believers during his upcoming visit.

- b. To receive praise from God (10:12-18)
"For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (v. 18). Unlike the false apostles, Paul does not boast of his own deeds or take credit for other people's work. His motive in preaching is to win praise from God.



B. Defense of Paul's Authority (Paul's Boasting) (11)

As the spiritual "father of the bride," Paul is filled with a godly jealousy for the Corinthian church. He wished to present the church to Christ as a chaste virgin on the last day. However, as the serpent deceived Eve, false apostles threatened the church's purity of faith. Thus, Paul asks the believers to bear with "a little folly" as he uses his opponents' tactics of "boasting" to defend his apostolic authority and teachings. These boastings include:

- a. The knowledge of God (11:1-6)
Paul addresses the worldly criteria by which he is judged. He admits that he is not as well trained in speech as the false apostles. However, his knowledge in God makes up for his lack.
- b. Financial independence (11:7-15)
It was an apostle's right to receive his living through the believers (1 Cor 3:9-18). Therefore, some people felt that Paul viewed himself as an inferior apostle because he insisted on "teaching for free." Paul reminds the believers that his financial independence is a deliberate act of love. He is cautious to not burden anyone so that no one can accuse him of personal gain.
- c. Experiences of an apostle (11:16-12:13)
On the surface, it seems as though Paul is trying to prove his equality with the boastful "super-apostles." However, Paul only boasts of his weaknesses so that Christ's strength may be revealed. Paul's "boastings" include:
 - i. Suffering for Christ (11:16-12:13)
 - ii. Spiritual experiences of heaven (12:1-4)
 - iii. Physical weaknesses (12:5-10)
 - iv. Signs, wonders, and mighty deeds (12:11-13)

C. Plans for Paul's Third Visit (12:14–13:14)

- a. Expectations & hopes (12:19-21)
 - i. For the sake of the believers, Paul promises to not be a financial burden (12:16). Like a parent, he is willing to sacrifice his energy and money to nurture the souls of the believers.
 - ii. During the visit, Paul hopes to find believers living in harmony and free of their old sins (uncleanness, fornication and lewdness (12:19-21)). Like a parent, he also threatens to react adversely if they continue to misbehave.
 - iii. Paul hopes that the believers will examine their own faith (13:1-10).
- b. Final greetings (13:11-14)
 Lastly, Paul encourages the believers to be complete, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and have the abidance of God.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



- 1** What were three main reasons why Paul wrote 2 Corinthians?
- 2** What are four qualities (each) of Paul's character and ministry?
- 3** According to chapter 5, what were two of Paul's motivations behind his ministry? How did he use the analogy of the tent?
- 4** What were three of Paul's hopes for the Corinthian believers?
- 5** Why do we need to be "separate and holy"?
- 6** Why does Paul "boast"? What does he "boast" about?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Part A- Adopt a Minister

Sometimes, it's not easy being a preacher. Like Paul, full-time ministers have to travel extensively, conduct rigorous training seminars,

and provide spiritual food for many churches and members. Because of the nature of their work, preachers face more temptations and frustrations than many other church members. Thus, it is vital that we pray for our ministers on a regular basis.

In this activity, let's develop the habit of putting our preachers into our prayer. As a class, let us adopt a preacher (or two) and determine to pray for them from now until the end of the quarter. All it takes is a few minutes a day to participate in this holy work!

Prayer log option: Teachers may choose to post a "preacher prayer log" in the classroom. At the end of every week, students may write their prayers or encouraging Bible verses onto the sheet. The sheet can be mailed as a gift to the "adopted" preacher at the end of the quarter.

Name of the preacher I'd like to adopt:	
Last time I prayed for him:	
My preacher's responsibilities in church:	
Things that may tempt/worry/frustrate my preacher:	
Three things I can help my preacher pray about:	
How I can participate in holy work by praying for these things:	
How frequently I plan on praying for my preacher:	
How many minutes I plan to pray for my preacher each time:	
Start date:	
End date:	

The Week of:	Prayer requests for my preacher	Date completed
Lesson 3		
Lesson 4		
Lesson 5		
Lesson 6		
Lesson 7		
Lesson 8		
Lesson 9		
Lesson 10		
Lesson 11		
Lesson 12		
Lesson 13		

Part B- Cheerful Giving: It's a Plan!

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." In this activity, let us brainstorm a plan of what we would like to contribute to the Lord and how we can accomplish it.

Part 1: Identifying the area of contribution

- a. Religious education
- b. Literary ministry
- c. Internet ministry
- d. Training seminars
- e. Evangelism
- f. Church Administration
- g. Music ministry
- h. Prayer team
- i. Youth fellowship
- j. Other

1. In which area(s) of sacred work is there a need or void in my church?
2. Out of these areas, which one would I most like to participate in?
3. What specific task within this area would I like to do?
4. Am I able to do this task right now?

Part 2: Asset evaluation

- a. Time
- b. Energy
- c. Talent
- d. Prayer
- e. Wealth
- f. Skills
- g. Knowledge
- h. Other

1. What assets do I need in order to contribute to the holy work in part 1?
2. What assets do I already have?
3. What assets do I need to acquire in order to serve the Lord in this area?
4. How do I plan on acquiring these assets?
 - What are some daily goals I can make?
 - What are some weekly goals I can make?
 - What are some yearly goals I can make?

Part 3: Long term goals

1. How do I see myself contributing to this holy work in college?
2. How do I see myself contributing to this holy work in 10 years?

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



1 Corinthians takes us into the heart of a first century church, while 2 Corinthians takes us into the heart of a first century minister. In this lesson, we can witness an apostle's heart, hopes, and expectations. It is touching to witness Paul's genuine and fatherly concern for a young church that has failed and rebelled against him. It is heart-wrenching to see his frustrations as a parent whose daughter has doubted his teachings, succumbed to outside influences, and compromised her purity and faithfulness to God. Yet, it is satisfying to know that our almighty God is there to help His servants solve parental difficulties and turn back to Him. As we leave 2 Corinthians behind, let us pray that the Lord will guide us as we sow in the ministry of young minds and hearts. Let us ask God for spiritual wisdom, so that we may guide our students just as Paul guided the Corinthian church.