

I OVERVIEW OF II CORINTHIANS

PURPOSES: To affirm Paul's ministry, defend his authority as an apostle, and refute false teachers in Corinth.

AUTHOR: Paul.

DATE: Approximately 55-57 AD from Macedonia.

SETTING: Paul had already written to the Corinthians using strong words to correct and teach. Most of the church responded in the right spirit; but others were denying Paul's authority and questioning his motives.

SPECIAL FEATURE: This is another strong and direct letter focused on addressing specific problems a New Testament Church was facing.

BLUEPRINT: Paul explains his actions (1:1-2:11)

Paul defends his ministry (2:12-7:16)

Paul defends the collection (8:1-9:15)

Paul defends his authority (10:1-13:14)

MEGATHEMES:

Trials	Paul experienced great suffering, persecution, and opposition in his ministry; inclusive of struggling with his "thorn in the flesh". Through it all, Paul affirmed God's faithfulness.
Church Discipline	Paul defends his role in church discipline. Neither immorality nor false teaching could be ignored. The church was to be neither lax nor too severe in administering discipline. The church was to restore the disciplined person when he/she repented.
Hope	To encourage the Corinthians as they faced trials. Paul reminded them that they would receive resurrection bodies in Heaven. He focused them on the future and away from present perils.
Giving	Paul organized a collection of funds for the poor in the Jerusalem church in which many of the Asian churches contributed to. Paul explains and defends his beliefs about giving, and urges the Corinthians to follow through on their previous commitment.
Sound Doctrine	False teachers ("poison in the pews") were challenging Paul's ministry and authority as an apostle. Paul asserts his authority in order to preserve correct Christian doctrine. His sincerity, love for Christ, and his concern for the people were his defense.

II SCRIPTURE

SEEKING RECONCILIATION (5:11-6:2)

Paul offers three complementary answers to the question, "What can I do when I desire reconciliation in a fractured relationship?" (1) Reach out in openness (II Corinthians 5:11-13); (2) Respond to Christ's love (II Corinthians 5:14-16); and (3) Remember God's work in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17-21).

(11) Message in light of our eternal destiny: Having a "fearful responsibility to the Lord" does not mean that believers become paralyzed. On the contrary, knowing God's perfection and that He will judge everyone's actions should spur us on to do good deeds, that which pleases our God. The fear of the Lord (**Proverbs 1:7**) also frees believers from all of life's anxieties and worries (**Romans 8:31**); giving us uncommon courage in the face of life's troubles.

Now, apart from Jesus, we are the righteous targets of the terror of the Lord (**Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23**). However, Jesus has delivered us from the terror of the Lord (**Romans 5:8**) and has made our hearts right.

We persuade men: The heart of presenting the gospel, as we intend to persuade men, not simply casting out ideas, nor caring how men respond to them. We should be like Paul, who passionately desired that men and women come to Jesus.

(12): Heart of the preacher: Those who brag about having a spectacular ministry rather than having a "sincere heart" are the false preachers (**II Corinthians 2:17**) who are only concerned about getting ahead in this world. They preached the Good News for money and popularity, while Paul preached out of a concern for eternity. You can see a teacher's heart by who he promotes: Jesus or himself.

(13-15) Paul is motivated by the love of God he has received: The Corinthian Christians probably thought Paul was crazy, because he seemed to be content with a life of pain, trials and discomfort **if it brought glory to God**. Everything that Paul and his companions did was driven by his desire to honor God. In being accused of being "beside himself", Paul is in good company, as Jesus was also accused of being out of His mind (**Mark 3:21; John 10:20**).

That those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again: If Jesus died for us, shouldn't we live for Him? Jesus gives us new life, not so that we can live for ourselves, but so we can live for Him. The question is simple: are you living for yourself, or are you living for Jesus? "He died for us that we might die to ourselves." (Calvin)

So now we know that God made us to live for Him and not for ourselves. It is our corrupted nature that makes us want to live for ourselves and not for the Lord, for we are and were created to live unto God (**Revelation 4:11**), not ourselves. Jesus lived completely unto God the Father and is the life-style model we should always follow.

(16) Because of this new life made possible by Jesus, old earthly things are far less important: We regard no one according to the flesh for the following reasons:

1. We do not look at things which are seen, but things unseen (**II Corinthians 4:18**);
2. Our earthly tent will be destroyed, but we will have a new eternal body (**II Corinthians 5:1**);
3. We walk by faith, not by sight (**II Corinthians 5:7**); and,
4. We do not glory in appearance, but we glory in heart (**II Corinthians 5:12**).

For all these reasons, we don't look to the image and appearance of the flesh, but to the **substance of the heart**.

Some think that it would be better if Jesus were present with us according to the flesh. However, it is not and Jesus knew this, which is why He told His disciples, "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (**John 16:7**).

(17) Jesus' resurrection life gives us new life: Paul teaches the great principle of regeneration. Jesus Christ changes those who come to Him by faith (**Hebrews 11:6**), and the change is from within, as there is a new covenant, a new perspective, a new body, a new church. All of creation is being renewed. This is an entirely new order of creation **under Christ's authority**.

Old things are passed away: The saved are not "just forgiven", but are changed into a new creation. Being a new creation doesn't mean that we are perfect, it means that we are changed, and are continually being changed from the inside (i.e., heart, mind) out (**Romans 6:1-14**).

Who makes us a new creation? This is something God alone can do in us. This isn't just "turning over a new leaf" or "getting your act together." The life of a new creation is not something God does for us, but in us. So, we are told to put off the old man, and to put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness (**Ephesians 4:22-24**).

(18-19) Message and ministry of reconciliation: God has initiated this ministry of reconciliation, even though He is the innocent party, reconciling us to Himself (**Romans 5:10**). He reconciles us by blotting out our sins (**Ephesians 2:13-18**) and making us right with Him, as we are no longer God's enemies or strangers or foreigners to him.

God did this through Jesus Christ. God did not reconcile us to Himself by neglecting His holy justice or "giving in" to sinful, rebellious humanity. He did it by an amazing, righteous, sacrifice of love. God demands not one bit less justice and righteousness from man under Jesus, but the demand has been satisfied through Jesus Christ.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself is amazing when understood in light of what happened on the cross. At some point before Jesus died, before the veil was torn in two, before Jesus cried out it is finished (τετελεσται) an awesome spiritual transaction took place. The Father lay upon the Son all the guilt and wrath our sin deserved, and Jesus bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the wrath of God for us.

As horrible as the physical suffering of Jesus was, this spiritual suffering, the act of being judged for sin in our place, was what Jesus really dreaded about the cross. The cup of God's righteous wrath is what He trembled at drinking (**Luke 22:39-46**; **Psalm 75:8**; **Isaiah 51:17**; **Jeremiah 25:15**). On the cross, Jesus became an enemy of God, who was judged and forced to drink the cup of the Father's fury, so we would not have to drink that cup.

8/15/10 **RELATIONSHIPS: THE RECONCILIATION FACTOR** 8/15/10

In and of itself, the suffering of the Son did not please the Father, but by accomplishing the work of reconciling the world to Himself, it completely pleased God the Father (**Isaiah 53:10**).

“We may not dare to probe too far into this mystery of Christ’s suffering on the Cross, but this fact throws some light on the tragic cry of Jesus just before he died: ‘My God, My God, why didst thou forsake me?’” (Robertson).

In that cry (**Matthew 27:46**; **Mark 15:34**), Jesus expresses both His partnership with God the Father (i.e., My God) and the agonizing feeling of receiving the wrath of God that we deserved.

Not imputing their trespasses to them: God has not gone soft and given mankind a “Get Out of Hell Free” card. Instead, it is because our trespasses were **imputed** to Jesus. The justice our sin demanded is satisfied (i.e., expiated), **not excused**. If God sets aside His wrath and His justice to save sinners, then the Cross, instead of being a demonstration of love, is an exhibition of unspeakable cruelty and injustice. If sin could be excused, then it never needed to be satisfied.

(20) Ambassadors for Christ: An ambassador is an official representative of one country to another. As believers, we are Christ’s ambassadors, sent with his message of reconciliation to the world. As an ambassador, Paul makes a simple, strong, direct plea, which is to be reconciled to God. As servants of the King, we are 24/7 ambassadors (**Romans 1:1**).

(21) God made reconciliation possible: Any man could be sinless was foreign to Jewish thinking (**Ecclesiastes 8:5**), but when Jesus claimed to be sinless, no one challenged Him (**John 8:46**).

Jesus never became a sinner, but He did become sin for us as a righteous act of love. Jesus was not a sinner, but on the cross, the Father treated Him as if He were a sinner. Yet all the while, sin was “outside” of Jesus, not “inside” Him, and a part of His nature (as it is with us).

That we might become the righteousness of God in Him: Jesus took our sin, giving us His righteousness (**Isaiah 53:4-6**; **Romans 3:21**). This tremendous exchange was prompted by God’s love for us.

II Corinthians 6 - Paul’s Résumé

(1-2) Responsibility of God’s great offer: Paul sees himself as a co-worker with Jesus Christ. They are partners, and Jesus has given us the ministry of reconciliation. Since Paul is among the ambassadors for Christ, he works with Jesus. It isn’t that God needed Paul, or for that matter, any of us. Instead, God wants us to be workers together with Him for our good (**Romans 8:28**).

It isn’t our work that God helps us with. It is His work that He asks us to do together with Him. Instead of trying to persuade God to help us with our work, instead, we need to find out what God’s work is, and do it with Him.

Not to receive the grace of God in vain: The Corinthian Christians had received the grace of God, yet, having received it, they were potentially guilty of receiving the grace of God in vain, so Paul pleads with them to not do this. Grace isn’t given because of any works, past, present or promised. It is given to **encourage work**, not to say work is unnecessary. God doesn’t want us to receive His grace and become passive (**James 2:26**; **James 4:17**).

What does it mean to receive the grace of God in vain? To receive the goodness and favor of God, yet to hinder the work of grace in one’s life and to receive the favor of God, and to fail in what Paul spoke of in I Corinthians 15:10.

8/15/10 **RELATIONSHIPS: THE RECONCILIATION FACTOR** 8/15/10

Many Christians struggle at this very point. Is God supposed to do it or am I supposed to do it? The answer is, **“Yes!”** God does it and we do it. Therefore, trust God (**Proverbs 3:5-6**), rely on Him (**Matthew 11:28; John 15:1-5**), and then get to work and work as hard as you can.

Now is the acceptable time . . . now is the day of salvation: By quoting and applying **Isaiah 49:8**, Paul wants to give the Corinthian Christians a sense of urgency. God has an acceptable time for us to work with His grace and a day of salvation that will not last forever (**II Peter 3:9**). It is time to get busy for the Lord, and to be workers together with Him.

BEING CONSISTENT (6:3-13)

These verses are intensely personal revealing Paul’s character as one who could not be discredited. Paul wrote a further appeal for reconciliation based on everything he had done as God’s minister. In everything he did, Paul always considered what his actions communicated about Jesus Christ.

(3) How this responsibility affected Paul: his passion to be blameless as a servant of the gospel: Paul was willing to forego his salary as a minister of the gospel (**I Corinthians 9:3-15**), willing to work hard and endure hardship (**Philippians 1:23**), and willing to allow others to be more prominent. He was not afraid to offend anyone over the gospel of Jesus Christ (**I Corinthians 1:18-25**), but he would not allow his style of ministry to offend anyone.

(4-10) Paul’s credentials as a blameless minister: Paul recounts his “resume” to Corinthians:

Qualification 1 was his **patience and this endurance** that was needed because of the general struggles and trials of life. Paul was often stressed and under pressure, often needy, and often in distress (**Philippians 4:11-13**); and,

Qualification 2 was his **self-inflicted hardships**. No one made him work so hard, or keep so many sleepless nights, or go without food so often. These were true trials, but ones Paul chose willingly as a co-worker with Jesus Christ.

In concluding his resume’, Paul lists his references, describing what both the world would think of him and what God thinks of him.

- The world and the worldly Corinthian Christians described Paul with words like: dishonor, evil report, deceivers, unknown, dying, chastened, sorrowful, poor, and having nothing.
- God described Paul with words like: we live, not killed, always rejoicing, making many rich and possessing all things.

II Corinthians 4:18 tells us which reference was true. According to the things which are seen, the world’s estimation was correct. However, according to the things which are not seen, God’s estimation was correct.

What a difference it makes to know Jesus! He cares for us in spite of what the world thinks. Christians don’t have to give in to public opinion and pressure. Paul remained joyous and content in the most difficult of hardships (Philippians 4:11-13).

(11-13) Paul's desire for reconciliation: Paul is practicing what he preached in **Ephesians 4:15** of speaking the truth in love. He genuinely loved the Corinthians with an open heart, yet he would also speak openly to them. However, the cold-hearted Corinthians loved the world too much, loved themselves too much, and refused to address their selfish, worldly attitudes towards Paul. This needed to be reconciled.

APPEALING FOR HOLINESS (6:14-7:4)

Paul notes several stark contrasts between the perspective of believers and the perspective of unbelievers that we must never forget in our pursuit of holiness. We must be careful who we form partnerships with, because partnerships with unbelievers might weaken our Christian commitment, integrity or standards. These verses especially have a strong application to marriage.

(14-18) Paul tells them to not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers: Paul is speaking of the overly broad affections of the Corinthian Christians who had joined themselves to unbelievers, affecting their reconciliation with Paul.

The idea of do not be unequally yoked together is based on Deuteronomy 22:9, which prohibited yoking together two different animals. It speaks of joining two things that should not be joined.

This really applies to any environment where we let the world influence our thinking. When we are being conformed to this world and are not being transformed by the renewing of your mind (**Romans 12:2**), we are joining together with unbelievers in an ungodly way.

The principle is that we are to be in the world, but not of the world, like a ship should be in the water, but water shouldn't be in the ship. But if the world is influencing us, it is clear we are unequally yoked together with unbelievers. This unequal yoke may come through a book, movie, TV show, magazine, or even through worldly Christian friends.

In **I Corinthians 6:19-20** Paul writes of individual Christians as being temples of God. Because temples are holy places, and should be protected against things that would defile the holy place, we should **protect our hearts and minds** as holy places before the Lord.

Paul quotes Jeremiah 31:9 to show that the benefit of separating from worldly influence is a more intimate relationship with God (i.e., I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters).

II Corinthians 7 – Comforted by the Corinthian Christians' Repentance

(1a) In light of God's promises: In **II Corinthians 6:14-18**, Paul wrote about the need to separate from worldly influences, so we can live a close life with God. If we separate ourselves from worldly thinking and acting, we are promised a closer relationship with God.

(1b) Two things to do in light of God's promises: Cleansing has a twofold action: (1) turning away from sin; and, (2) turning toward God (**James 4:6-7**). The Corinthians needed to make a clean break with their past and give themselves to God alone.

- **Negative thing to do:** Cleanse ourselves from all filthiness. There is a cleansing that God alone does in our lives, in cooperation with us. This cleansing comes to us as we trust in Jesus and His work on our behalf; this work of cleansing is really God's work in us, and not our work (**I John 1:9**).

Sometimes it is easier to deal with the filthiness of the flesh than the filthiness of the spirit. During Jesus' earthly ministry, those who were stained by the filthiness of the flesh (e.g., harlots, tax collectors) found it easy to come to Jesus. But those stained by the filthiness of the spirit (e.g., scribes, Pharisees) found it hard to come to Jesus.

- **Positive thing to do:** Perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Paul isn't writing about some state of sinless perfection, he is writing about a complete, "whole" holiness.

"I suppose that, the nearer we get to heaven, the more conscious we shall be of our imperfections. The more light we get, the more we discover our own darkness. That which is scarcely accounted sin by some men, will be a grievous defilement to a tender conscience. It is not that we are greater sinners as we grow older, but that we have a finer sensibility of sin, and see that to be sin which we winked at in the days of our ignorance."
(Spurgeon)

(2-3) Paul's appeal: Open your hearts to us: Paul's desire isn't to condemn the Corinthian Christians, but to restore the bonds of fellowship between them. He was confronting the Corinthians, but he did not want to condemn them. He wanted them to clearly see that he never wronged anyone, corrupted anyone, or defrauded anyone.

It is possible to confront without condemning, though those who are being confronted rarely think so.

(4) Paul is encouraged by good news from the Corinthian Christians: Paul has been bold in his criticism of the Corinthians. Despite the many trials Paul was facing from both within and without, he could find joy, and part of that joy was good news from the Corinthian Christians.

Paul pleaded with the Corinthian Christians to be reconciled to him, while explaining that he had always treated them right because of his love for them.