POWER IN WEAKNESS

God's Strength in a Broken World

A Comprehensive Verse-by-Verse Commentary on Second Corinthians



Dr. Paul Crawford

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PREFACE

Discovering God's Power in Human Weakness

There are moments in the Christian life when our strength fails, our confidence falters, and the burdens we carry seem greater than our ability to endure. There are seasons when prayers appear unanswered, suffering seems unending, and the path before us becomes increasingly difficult to understand. It is during these moments that we discover one of the most profound truths in all of Scripture: **God's**

greatest demonstrations of power often come through the greatest expressions of human weakness.

This is the central message of the Apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

The world measures strength by influence, wealth, achievement, recognition, and the ability to overcome opposition through human determination. Yet the kingdom of God operates according to an entirely different standard. In God's economy, strength is not always demonstrated through victory over circumstances, but often through faithfulness in the midst of them. Power is not necessarily revealed by the removal of suffering, but through the grace that sustains the believer while suffering continues.

The Apostle Paul understood this truth perhaps better than most.

He was a man called by God, commissioned by the risen Christ, and entrusted with the glorious message of the gospel. He had witnessed extraordinary manifestations of divine power, endured relentless persecution, established churches, defended sound doctrine, and proclaimed salvation through Jesus Christ throughout the Roman world.

Yet Paul was also a man acquainted with profound personal suffering.

He knew what it meant to be rejected, misunderstood, falsely accused, betrayed, beaten, imprisoned, and abandoned. He experienced physical weakness, emotional distress, spiritual opposition, and the tremendous responsibility of caring for the churches he had helped establish.

Nevertheless, through every hardship, Paul discovered that the sufficiency of God's grace was greater than the severity of his circumstances.

The Lord's declaration to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 serves as the foundation of this commentary:

> "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

These words are not merely a comforting religious expression. They reveal a profound theological reality concerning the relationship between divine sovereignty, human limitation, spiritual dependence, and the sustaining power of God.

God did not promise Paul a life without suffering. He did not remove every burden, silence every enemy, heal every affliction, or eliminate every obstacle. Instead, He promised something infinitely greater: **His own sufficient grace.**

And that grace was enough.

Why This Commentary Was Written

I have written *Power in Weakness: God's Strength in a Broken World* with a sincere desire to help believers understand the depth, richness, and enduring relevance of Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church.

Second Corinthians is among the most personal, emotionally revealing, and spiritually profound writings in the New Testament. Within its pages, we encounter not merely the theological instruction of an apostle, but the heart of a servant who had surrendered his life to Jesus Christ.

Unlike letters that focus primarily upon systematic doctrinal arguments or the correction of particular congregational problems, Second Corinthians gives us an extraordinary glimpse into the inner life of Christian ministry.

We see Paul's tears.

We hear his concerns.

We witness his struggles.

We feel the weight of his disappointments.

We recognize the pain of his rejection.

Yet above every trial, we observe the unwavering faithfulness of the God who called him.

Paul does not present himself as an untouchable spiritual giant immune to the hardships of ordinary life. Instead, he openly acknowledges his weaknesses, confronts his limitations, and repeatedly directs attention away from himself and toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is precisely what makes Second Corinthians so desperately needed in the modern church.

We live in an age when religious success is frequently measured by numbers, financial resources, public recognition, impressive facilities, and the popularity of spiritual leaders. Too often, outward appearances are mistaken for inward spiritual maturity, and worldly influence is confused with divine approval.

Yet Paul's testimony stands as a powerful correction to these misconceptions.

The true measure of Christian ministry is not celebrity, prosperity, or applause. It is faithfulness to Jesus Christ, obedience to the Word of God, dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and perseverance through whatever circumstances divine providence permits.

The church does not need more displays of human greatness.

The church needs a renewed demonstration of the power and glory of Jesus Christ.

That conviction lies at the heart of this work.

The Message of Second Corinthians for a Broken World

We are living in a world deeply affected by sin, confusion, division, suffering, and spiritual deception.

Families are struggling under tremendous pressures. Churches are confronting doctrinal compromise. Faithful pastors are facing discouragement. Christians are experiencing persecution, emotional exhaustion, financial hardship, physical affliction, and spiritual battles.

Many believers have quietly asked questions that they hesitate to express openly.

Why does God allow His faithful servants to suffer?

Why are some prayers answered differently than we desire?

Why do those who stand for biblical truth sometimes experience the greatest opposition?

How can a Christian remain faithful when circumstances appear hopeless?

Where is God's power when human strength has disappeared?

These questions are neither new nor unique to our generation.

The Apostle Paul confronted these same realities nearly two thousand years ago.

Second Corinthians reminds us that the presence of suffering does not indicate the absence of God. The existence of opposition does not necessarily signify divine displeasure. Human weakness does not prevent spiritual usefulness, and earthly affliction does not cancel eternal promises.

Indeed, Paul teaches that God frequently accomplishes His greatest purposes through circumstances that appear, from a human perspective, to represent failure.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul writes:

> "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

What an extraordinary picture of the Christian life!

The believer is compared to an ordinary earthen vessel—fragile, vulnerable, and possessing little intrinsic glory. Yet within that vessel God has placed the priceless treasure of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The value belongs not to the container, but to the treasure it carries.

The power belongs not to the servant, but to the Savior he serves.

The glory belongs not to humanity, but to God alone.

When this truth is properly understood, it transforms our understanding of Christian service, spiritual maturity, suffering, and success.

We no longer need to pretend that we are sufficient in ourselves.

We no longer need to conceal every struggle beneath an appearance of spiritual invincibility.

Instead, we are invited to confess our dependence upon the One whose strength never diminishes and whose grace never fails.

A Verse-by-Verse Examination of God's Word

The purpose of this commentary is to examine Second Corinthians carefully, systematically, and faithfully, allowing the biblical text to establish the meaning and direction of our study.

I believe that Scripture must be interpreted within its historical, grammatical, literary, and theological context. The task of the biblical expositor is not to impose personal opinions upon the Word of God, but to discover, explain, and apply the meaning intended by the inspired text.

The Bible is not merely a collection of inspirational thoughts or religious traditions. It is the authoritative revelation of God, given for the instruction, correction, encouragement, and spiritual growth of His people.

As the Apostle Paul declared in 2 Timothy 3:16:

> "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Throughout this commentary, particular attention is given to the historical circumstances surrounding Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church, the doctrinal significance of his teaching, the meaning of important biblical expressions, and the practical implications of each passage.

Where necessary, significant Greek words and grammatical constructions are examined to clarify the meaning of the text.

The theological themes of divine sovereignty, salvation, sanctification, reconciliation, spiritual warfare, Christian stewardship, apostolic authority, and the sufficiency of grace receive special consideration.

At the same time, I have sought to make this commentary understandable and useful to pastors, Bible teachers, theological students, and ordinary believers who desire a deeper knowledge of God's Word.

Sound doctrine should never be separated from practical Christian living.

Theology is not merely information to be accumulated. Biblical truth is intended to shape our thinking, transform our conduct, strengthen our faith, and deepen our fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Therefore, this work is designed not simply to explain what Paul wrote, but also to consider how the timeless principles of his inspired letter apply to the challenges confronting believers today.

The Glory of Christ Above the Greatness of Man

One of the most striking characteristics of Second Corinthians is the contrast between the apparent weakness of God's servants and the incomparable power of the Lord they proclaim.

Paul's opponents questioned his qualifications, criticized his appearance, challenged his authority, and sought to undermine his ministry.

Rather than defending himself according to worldly standards of greatness, Paul repeatedly emphasized the sufficiency of Christ.

He understood that Christian ministry was never intended to become a monument to human personality.

A preacher may possess eloquence, education, experience, and influence, but none of these qualities can regenerate a sinner, transform a heart, or impart eternal life.

Only God can accomplish those things.

A church may possess magnificent buildings, extensive programs, considerable financial resources, and widespread recognition, yet remain spiritually impoverished if the truth of God's Word has been neglected.

Conversely, a small congregation, an obscure preacher, or an overlooked believer may be used mightily by God when there is genuine submission to His will and unwavering faithfulness to His truth.

The effectiveness of Christian ministry cannot be accurately measured by outward appearance alone.

In 2 Corinthians 3:5, Paul declares:

> "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

This principle deserves renewed emphasis in every generation.

Human ability has its place, but human ability cannot replace divine enablement.

Education is valuable, but education cannot substitute for spiritual regeneration.

Organization may serve the church, but organization cannot produce the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian minister must never forget that he is a servant, not the Savior.

The church belongs to Jesus Christ.

The gospel belongs to Jesus Christ.

The power belongs to Jesus Christ.

And the glory must always return to Jesus Christ.

The Necessity of Faithfulness in an Age of Compromise

Second Corinthians also confronts one of the greatest dangers facing the church: the subtle corruption of biblical truth.

Paul warned the Corinthians concerning false apostles, deceitful workers, and those who sought to promote another Jesus and another gospel.

His warnings were not merely responses to temporary controversies within a first-century congregation. They express permanent principles concerning the necessity of doctrinal discernment and faithfulness to divine revelation.

In every generation, the church encounters pressure to accommodate the prevailing philosophies, moral standards, and religious preferences of the surrounding culture.

There is always a temptation to soften difficult doctrines, minimize the seriousness of sin, replace repentance with superficial affirmation, and substitute entertainment or human wisdom for the faithful proclamation of Scripture.

But biblical Christianity cannot remain faithful to Christ while abandoning the truth He has revealed.

A gospel without the cross is not the biblical gospel.

A message without repentance cannot faithfully represent the apostolic proclamation.

A ministry that exalts human personalities above Jesus Christ has departed from the proper foundation of Christian service.

And a church that measures truth according to cultural approval has surrendered the very authority it was commissioned to proclaim.

Paul's defense of his apostleship reminds us that the preservation of sound doctrine is not an optional concern reserved for theologians.

It is a responsibility entrusted to the entire body of Christ.

Faithfulness to Scripture may bring opposition, criticism, and rejection, but the approval of God is infinitely more valuable than the applause of the world.

The Thorn That God Did Not Remove

No discussion of Second Corinthians would be complete without special attention to Paul's thorn in the flesh.

This remarkable passage has brought encouragement to suffering Christians throughout the centuries.

Paul experienced an affliction that he earnestly desired God to remove. On three occasions, he pleaded with the Lord for deliverance.

Yet the answer he received was not the answer he originally sought.

God did not remove the thorn.

Instead, He declared:

> "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Here we encounter a truth that challenges many modern assumptions concerning the Christian life.

God's love is not proven exclusively through the removal of hardship.

His faithfulness is not dependent upon granting every request according to our expectations.

His power is not diminished when He permits His children to endure circumstances they would never have chosen for themselves.

Sometimes God delivers us from the trial.

Sometimes He sustains us through the trial.

In both cases, His grace remains sufficient.

The thorn that Paul wanted removed became an instrument through which he learned a deeper dependence upon Christ.

His weakness became the setting in which divine strength was most clearly displayed.

His limitation became an opportunity for the Lord's power to rest upon him.

This does not mean suffering is pleasant, nor does it suggest that pain should be pursued for its own sake.

It means that suffering is never beyond the sovereign authority of God, and that the Lord is able to accomplish eternal purposes even through the most difficult experiences of His people.

Some who read this commentary will be carrying burdens that no one else fully understands.

Some will be struggling with illness.

Others will be grieving the loss of loved ones.

Some will be facing disappointment in ministry, conflict within their families, or circumstances that have left them emotionally and spiritually exhausted.

To every such believer, the message of Second Corinthians remains profoundly relevant:

Your weakness does not place you beyond the reach of God's power.

The grace that sustained Paul is the same grace upon which every child of God must depend.

A Personal Word to the Reader

As I have reflected upon the message of Second Corinthians, I have become increasingly convinced that one of the greatest needs within the church is a renewed understanding of our complete dependence upon God.

We often speak of faith while relying heavily upon our own understanding.

We proclaim divine sovereignty while struggling to surrender control.

We celebrate the grace of God while quietly attempting to earn His favor through personal achievement.

We preach the power of Christ while measuring spiritual success according to human standards.

But Scripture continually reminds us that everything of eternal value originates in God.

Our salvation is of grace.

Our righteousness is found in Christ.

Our spiritual understanding comes through divine revelation.

Our perseverance is sustained by God's faithfulness.

And whatever fruit may be produced through our lives ultimately belongs to His glory.

I do not offer this commentary as the final word on every interpretive question or theological difficulty found within Second Corinthians. No human commentator possesses exhaustive understanding of the inspired Scriptures.

Rather, I offer this work as a careful and reverent effort to explain the biblical text, uphold sound doctrine, and encourage believers to examine the Word of God for themselves.

My prayer is that readers will not simply acquire additional knowledge concerning the Apostle Paul, but will develop a deeper appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ whom Paul served.

If this commentary encourages a struggling believer to continue trusting God, strengthens a discouraged pastor to remain faithful, helps a Bible teacher communicate the Scriptures more accurately, or leads a reader to a clearer understanding of the gospel, then it will have served a worthy purpose.

Above all, I pray that every page will direct attention to the sufficiency, majesty, and glory of Jesus Christ.

When Our Strength Ends, His Grace Remains

The message of Second Corinthians is ultimately a message of hope.

Not the shallow hope that promises a life without difficulty, but the steadfast hope grounded in the character, promises, and eternal purposes of God.

The believer may be troubled, yet not ultimately defeated.

Persecuted, yet not forsaken.

Cast down, yet not destroyed.

The outward man may perish, but the inward man is renewed day by day.

The afflictions of this present life, however painful, cannot compare with the eternal glory that awaits those who belong to Jesus Christ.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17–18:

> "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;
>
> While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

These words remind us that the Christian life must always be understood from the perspective of eternity.

Our present circumstances are not the conclusion of God's redemptive story.

Our failures are not greater than His mercy.

Our burdens are not stronger than His sustaining grace.

And our weaknesses are not obstacles too great for His sovereign power.

The God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead is fully able to sustain every believer who places his confidence in Him.

Therefore, as we begin this journey through the thirteen chapters of Second Corinthians, I invite you to approach the Scriptures with a humble heart, an open Bible, and a sincere desire to hear what the Spirit of God has revealed.

Let us lay aside the illusion of self-sufficiency.

Let us abandon the pursuit of human glory.

Let us recognize the limitations of our own strength.

And let us fix our eyes upon the Lord Jesus Christ, whose grace is sufficient for every trial, whose power is greater than every weakness, and whose promises endure throughout eternity.

For when human strength has reached its end, divine grace has not been exhausted.

When earthly resources have failed, heavenly provision remains.

When our abilities prove insufficient, the power of Christ is undiminished.

And when we stand before the Lord with nothing to boast of in ourselves, we discover the everlasting truth that shaped the Apostle Paul's life and ministry:

"For when I am weak, then am I strong." — 2 Corinthians 12:10

May the Lord use this commentary to deepen your understanding of His Word, strengthen your faith in His promises, and remind you that the greatest power in the Christian life does not come from within ourselves, but from the risen and glorified Savior who lives and reigns forever.

To Him alone be all the glory.

Dr. Paul Crawford
Author and Founder, Crawford Bible Commentary

Soli Deo Gloria — Glory to God Alone

PROLOGUE

The Apostle, the Church, and the God of All Comfort

When the Servant Is Broken, the Savior Remains Strong

There is a kind of suffering that cannot be measured by the wounds upon a man's body.

It is the suffering of a heart burdened by those it loves. It is the anguish of being misunderstood by those one has faithfully served. It is the sorrow of watching spiritual truth rejected, sacred relationships fractured, and the work of God threatened by the very people who should have defended it.

It is the pain of giving everything for Christ and discovering that obedience does not exempt a believer from opposition.

The Apostle Paul knew this suffering intimately.

He had endured the brutality of Roman persecution, the hostility of religious opponents, the loneliness of imprisonment, and the physical agony of repeated beatings. He had traveled dangerous roads, crossed unpredictable seas, and preached the gospel in cities where his message was considered both foolish and offensive.

Yet some of his deepest wounds were not inflicted by Roman soldiers or angry unbelievers.

They came from within the church.

They came from people he had loved, taught, corrected, and led toward Jesus Christ.

And nowhere is this struggle more painfully revealed than in his relationship with the Corinthian believers.

Second Corinthians is more than an apostolic letter. It is the testimony of a suffering servant who discovered that God's grace was greater than his weakness, that divine power was not dependent upon human approval, and that the glory of Jesus Christ could shine through even the most fragile vessel.

Before we begin our verse-by-verse examination of this remarkable epistle, we must first understand the man who wrote it, the church that received it, and the sovereign God whose faithfulness stands at the center of every chapter.

I. A City of Wealth, Corruption, and Spiritual Darkness

Corinth was a city of extraordinary opportunity and profound moral contradiction.

Situated upon the narrow isthmus connecting mainland Greece with the Peloponnese, Corinth occupied a strategically important position in the Roman world. Its location made it a center of trade, travel, political influence, and cultural exchange.

Merchants brought goods from distant regions. Travelers carried competing philosophies and religious beliefs. Wealth circulated through the city, and the pursuit of pleasure was woven deeply into its public life.

The city had been destroyed by Roman forces in 146 B.C. and later reestablished as a Roman colony under Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. By the time of the Apostle Paul, Corinth had become a significant commercial and administrative center of the Roman province of Achaia.

Its population represented a mixture of social classes, ethnic backgrounds, religious traditions, and economic circumstances.

Corinth offered opportunities for prosperity, but its spiritual atmosphere was deeply influenced by pagan worship, social ambition, and the moral practices of the surrounding Greco-Roman culture.

Temples and religious institutions reflected the city's devotion to numerous gods. Philosophical movements competed for public attention. Wealth and social status often determined a person's influence, while public speaking and rhetorical skill were highly prized.

In such a culture, the message of a crucified Savior stood in direct opposition to prevailing assumptions about wisdom, power, honor, and greatness.

The gospel proclaimed that human beings could not save themselves through philosophy, moral achievement, religious ceremony, or social prestige.

Salvation came through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had been crucified for sinners and raised from the dead.

It was a message that humbled the proud, confronted the self-righteous, and offered eternal hope to the broken.

And it was into this environment that God sent the Apostle Paul.

The establishment of a Christian congregation in Corinth would become a testimony to the transforming power of the gospel.

But it would also become the setting for some of the most painful challenges Paul experienced in his ministry.

II. The Apostle Arrives in Corinth

When Paul entered Corinth during his second missionary journey, he came as a servant commissioned by the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

He was not a stranger to hardship.

His missionary labors had already brought him into conflict with religious authorities, political powers, and hostile crowds. He had witnessed the power of the gospel to transform lives, but he had also experienced the hatred that frequently accompanied its proclamation.

According to Acts 18, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, fellow Jewish believers who shared his trade of tentmaking.

He worked alongside them while reasoning in the synagogue and persuading both Jews and Greeks concerning the truth of the gospel.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself to declaring that Jesus was the Christ.

Opposition soon followed.

Yet rejection did not mean that God had abandoned His servant.

Paul continued preaching, and the Lord began drawing people to Himself.

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with his household. Many other Corinthians heard the gospel, believed, and were baptized.

A congregation was being established in one of the most morally challenging cities of the ancient world.

But Paul still faced opposition and uncertainty.

Then the Lord spoke to him in a vision.

Acts 18:9–10 records these remarkable words:

> "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:
>
> For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city."

What encouragement these words must have brought!

The Lord did not tell Paul that Corinth would be easy.

He did not promise that opposition would disappear permanently.

He did not declare that every person who heard the gospel would receive it gladly.

Instead, He assured Paul of His presence and revealed that His saving purpose in the city would not fail.

The success of the mission rested upon the faithfulness and power of God.

Paul remained in Corinth for eighteen months, teaching the Word of God among the people.

The church that emerged was not the achievement of human persuasion alone. It was the result of divine grace operating through the faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ.

The gospel had entered Corinth.

Lives had been changed.

Sinners had been reconciled to God.

Yet the challenges facing this young congregation were only beginning.

III. A Church Delivered from the World but Still Struggling with the World

The Corinthian church was established through the power of the gospel, but its members had not been instantly removed from every influence of the surrounding culture.

They had been converted out of a society marked by idolatry, immorality, social competition, and worldly ambition.

Although their standing before God had been transformed through Jesus Christ, they still needed instruction, correction, and spiritual maturity.

The problems that eventually arose within the congregation were serious.

Divisions developed among believers.

Some elevated particular spiritual leaders and formed competing factions.

Questions arose concerning marriage, Christian liberty, public worship, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection of the dead.

Sexual immorality threatened the holiness of the congregation.

Some believers misused their freedom in Christ.

Others allowed pride and spiritual arrogance to disrupt their fellowship.

Paul addressed many of these concerns in the letter we know as First Corinthians.

His instructions were direct, doctrinally substantial, and sometimes severe.

He called the church to repentance, restored biblical priorities, defended the holiness of Christian conduct, and reminded believers that the congregation belonged to Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 3:11, he declared:

> "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

That principle was essential.

The church could not build lasting spiritual health upon personality, human wisdom, religious entertainment, or cultural popularity.

Its only secure foundation was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet correcting a congregation is not always welcomed by those who need correction.

The faithful minister who lovingly confronts sin may discover that the truth he proclaims produces resentment rather than immediate repentance.

The same people who once appreciated his ministry may begin questioning his motives.

Those he has sacrificed to serve may misunderstand his heart.

And so it was with Paul.

The problems at Corinth moved beyond questions of church practice and Christian conduct.

They became deeply personal.

IV. When Spiritual Leadership Becomes a Source of Pain

At some point during Paul's continuing relationship with the Corinthians, tensions intensified.

A painful visit, reflected in 2 Corinthians 2:1 and 13:2, appears to have left Paul and the congregation in a strained relationship.

The exact details of every incident are not preserved in Scripture, and responsible interpretation requires us to distinguish what the biblical text states from what may be reasonably reconstructed.

Nevertheless, the central reality is unmistakable.

Paul's apostolic authority had been challenged.

His sincerity was questioned.

His ministry was criticized.

His relationship with the Corinthians had become a source of profound emotional suffering.

Some apparently judged him by outward appearance, rhetorical ability, and worldly standards of influence.

Others questioned his motives and integrity.

The accusations directed against Paul threatened not only his personal reputation but also the Corinthians' confidence in the gospel he preached.

To Paul, this was no minor disagreement.

He understood that the message of Christ could not be separated from the faithful apostolic witness through which that message had been delivered.

He was not defending himself merely to preserve personal dignity.

He was defending the truth.

Yet his defense was not motivated by hatred toward the Corinthian believers.

It was motivated by love.

In 2 Corinthians 2:4, Paul revealed the depth of his concern:

> "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you."

Consider the significance of those words.

The Apostle Paul, a man who had faced persecution and suffering with extraordinary courage, confessed that he had written to the Corinthians with tears.

He was not an emotionless defender of doctrine.

He was not a cold religious authority concerned only with maintaining control.

He was a spiritual father whose heart was deeply wounded because those he loved were in danger.

His tears were the tears of pastoral concern.

His correction was an expression of genuine love.

His warnings arose from a desire to see the church restored to faithful obedience.

Here we discover a truth that every pastor, preacher, and Christian leader must understand:

Faithful ministry requires more than the courage to proclaim the truth. It also requires the love to grieve over those who resist it.

Biblical leadership is not merely the exercise of authority.

It is the willingness to carry burdens, confront sin, endure misunderstanding, and continue seeking the spiritual good of others even when doing so brings personal pain.

Paul understood that the spiritual welfare of the church was more important than his personal comfort.

And so he continued to labor for their restoration.

V. The Letter Written with Tears

The correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church extended beyond the two canonical epistles preserved in the New Testament.

First Corinthians 5:9 refers to an earlier letter, and Second Corinthians 2:3–4 and 7:8–12 describe a severe communication written during a particularly painful period.

Scholars differ concerning the precise reconstruction of the correspondence and whether portions of these communications may be identified with material preserved elsewhere. Scripture does not supply every historical detail necessary to settle those questions conclusively.

What is clear is that Paul's relationship with the Corinthians involved repeated instruction, serious correction, and a continuing desire for reconciliation.

After sending a strongly worded communication, Paul was deeply concerned about how the church would respond.

Would they reject his correction?

Would their hearts become further hardened?

Would false teachers succeed in turning them away from the truth?

Or would the Holy Spirit use the painful words of their spiritual father to bring genuine repentance?

Paul waited for news.

That waiting was itself a trial.

Anyone who has invested deeply in the spiritual welfare of others understands something of this burden.

There are times when a minister must speak the truth, knowing that the outcome rests beyond his control.

He may faithfully preach the Word, but he cannot force repentance.

He may lovingly warn of danger, but he cannot compel obedience.

He may pour out his heart before God, but he cannot change another person's heart through human effort.

The work of transformation belongs to the Lord.

And so Paul waited, carrying both sorrow and hope.

VI. Troubled on Every Side, Yet Comforted by God

When Paul came into Macedonia, his circumstances remained difficult.

In 2 Corinthians 7:5, he described his condition:

> "For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears."

The words reveal an extraordinary level of personal distress.

Outside were conflicts.

Inside were fears.

Paul was not pretending that the difficulties of ministry had no effect upon him.

He openly acknowledged his struggles.

Yet the next verse introduces one of the most beautiful descriptions of divine comfort in Scripture:

> "Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." — 2 Corinthians 7:6

Notice the opening word.

Nevertheless.

It is a small word carrying tremendous spiritual significance.

Paul was troubled.

Nevertheless, God comforted him.

Paul faced opposition.

Nevertheless, God remained faithful.

Paul experienced fear.

Nevertheless, the promises of God had not failed.

The arrival of Titus brought encouraging news concerning the Corinthians.

Many had responded positively to Paul's correction. There was evidence of sorrow, earnest concern, and a renewed affection for the apostle.

Their repentance brought Paul tremendous joy.

The broken relationship was moving toward restoration.

But not every difficulty had disappeared.

Opposition to Paul's ministry continued, and certain individuals still challenged his authority and sought to undermine the confidence of the church.

It was in this complicated setting of restored fellowship, lingering conflict, personal suffering, and renewed hope that Paul wrote the letter we now know as Second Corinthians.

This background helps us understand why the epistle moves between tenderness and firmness, encouragement and warning, thanksgiving and defense.

It is the writing of a man who loved the church enough to comfort its members, correct their errors, confront their enemies, and call them to a deeper relationship with Christ.

VII. The God of All Comfort

As Paul begins Second Corinthians, he does not immediately launch into a defense of his apostolic ministry.

He begins by praising God.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, he writes:

> "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;
>
> Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

These verses establish one of the foundational themes of the entire epistle.

God is not distant from the suffering of His people.

He is the Father of mercies.

He is the God of all comfort.

His compassion is not limited by the depth of human sorrow, and His sustaining power is not exhausted by the severity of life's trials.

But Paul reveals something even more profound.

The comfort we receive from God is not intended to terminate with us.

It is given so that we may become instruments of comfort to others.

God frequently transforms our deepest struggles into opportunities for ministry.

The believer who has experienced grief may become especially sensitive to the sorrow of another.

The Christian who has endured spiritual opposition may be equipped to encourage someone facing similar resistance.

The pastor who has learned dependence upon God through hardship may preach with a depth of compassion that cannot be acquired through academic study alone.

This does not mean that suffering automatically produces spiritual maturity.

Trials can expose bitterness, pride, resentment, and unbelief.

But when suffering is met with faith, submission, and dependence upon the grace of God, it can become an instrument through which the Lord deepens our character and prepares us to serve others.

The God who comforts His children also equips them to become channels of His mercy.

And this is one reason Second Corinthians is so deeply relevant to every generation.

The church will always contain hurting people.

There will always be believers struggling under burdens the world cannot see.

There will always be ministers facing discouragement, families carrying grief, and Christians confronting circumstances that test the foundations of their faith.

The answer is not found in pretending that suffering does not exist.

It is found in directing wounded hearts toward the God of all comfort.

VIII. The Treasure Within the Broken Vessel

Perhaps no image in Second Corinthians captures the character of Christian ministry more vividly than the earthen vessel.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul declares:

> "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

Imagine an ordinary clay vessel.

It possesses no remarkable beauty.

Its material is common.

Its structure is fragile.

It can be chipped, cracked, and broken.

By itself, it is of little significance.

Yet suppose that within this unimpressive container someone has placed a treasure of immeasurable value.

The worth of the vessel is now understood in relation to what it carries.

So it is with the believer.

We are weak.

We are limited.

We grow weary.

We experience sorrow, disappointment, and physical decline.

Our abilities are temporary, our knowledge is incomplete, and our earthly lives are fleeting.

Yet God has entrusted His people with the glorious treasure of the gospel.

The light of the knowledge of His glory shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

The message of salvation has been committed to ordinary human servants.

The extraordinary power belongs entirely to God.

Paul's imagery destroys the illusion that Christian usefulness requires human perfection.

God does not need flawless vessels to accomplish His eternal purposes.

He uses imperfect people who are dependent upon His grace.

He uses those who recognize that their sufficiency is not found within themselves.

He uses servants who are willing to decrease so that Christ may be exalted.

This is a truth that should humble every spiritual leader and encourage every struggling believer.

The Lord's power is not limited by the weakness of the instrument through which He chooses to work.

Indeed, He frequently permits human weakness to become visible so that no one can mistake the source of the power.

The glory belongs to God alone.

IX. The Ministry That Refuses to Surrender

As Second Corinthians unfolds, Paul describes the tremendous hardships he experienced for the sake of the gospel.

He was afflicted.

He was perplexed.

He was persecuted.

He was cast down.

Yet none of these experiences could overturn the saving purposes of God.

In 2 Corinthians 4:8–9, he writes:

> "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;
>
> Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."

What a remarkable testimony!

Paul did not deny the reality of his troubles.

He acknowledged them openly.

But he refused to interpret his circumstances as evidence that God had abandoned him.

His confidence was not rooted in favorable conditions.

It was rooted in the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This distinction is essential.

Biblical faith does not require believers to deny pain or pretend that hardship is insignificant.

True faith acknowledges the reality of suffering while continuing to trust the character and promises of God.

The Christian may be perplexed without surrendering to despair.

He may experience persecution without being forsaken by his heavenly Father.

He may be brought low without being finally destroyed.

He may lose earthly possessions, personal recognition, and human approval without losing the eternal inheritance secured through Jesus Christ.

Paul's endurance was not evidence of extraordinary human toughness.

It was evidence of extraordinary divine grace.

His strength came from beyond himself.

And the same is true for every faithful child of God.

X. When the Thorn Remains

Near the conclusion of this letter, Paul reveals one of the most personal experiences recorded in his writings.

He had received extraordinary revelations from God.

Yet, to prevent him from becoming exalted beyond measure, he was given what he described as a thorn in the flesh.

The precise nature of this affliction is not identified in the biblical text.

Throughout Christian history, interpreters have proposed various explanations, including physical suffering, persistent opposition, and other forms of personal affliction.

The important point is not that every reader must identify the thorn, but that Scripture clearly reveals God's purpose in allowing it to remain.

Paul pleaded with the Lord three times for its removal.

He wanted relief.

He desired deliverance.

He sought an end to the burden.

But God's answer was different from what Paul had requested.

The Lord declared:

> "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Here stands the central truth around which this entire commentary is organized.

POWER IN WEAKNESS.

God's strength is not dependent upon the removal of every limitation.

His grace is not diminished by the continuation of suffering.

His sovereign purposes are not frustrated by the frailty of human beings.

Sometimes the most powerful testimony a Christian can offer is not that God removed the burden, but that God sustained him while the burden remained.

Sometimes the greatest victory is not escape from suffering, but faithfulness through suffering.

Sometimes the clearest evidence of divine power is a believer who continues trusting Christ when every earthly source of strength has been exhausted.

Paul learned to rejoice, not because pain itself was desirable, but because the sustaining power of Christ was sufficient in the midst of his weakness.

His thorn had not made him useless.

It had taught him dependence.

His affliction had not destroyed his ministry.

It had become an occasion for the manifestation of divine strength.

His limitations had not diminished the glory of Christ.

They had magnified it.

What Paul initially desired to escape became part of the testimony through which countless generations would learn the sufficiency of God's grace.

And so the apostle declared:

> "For when I am weak, then am I strong." — 2 Corinthians 12:10

Those words are not the language of defeat.

They are the declaration of a man who has discovered the inexhaustible resources of the living God.

XI. A Message the Modern Church Must Hear

Nearly two thousand years have passed since Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians.

The Roman Empire that dominated his world has long since fallen.

The commercial life of ancient Corinth has disappeared.

The social structures, political authorities, and cultural institutions of Paul's generation have changed beyond recognition.

Yet the spiritual realities addressed in this epistle remain remarkably familiar.

Churches still struggle with division.

Pastors still experience discouragement.

Believers still confront suffering.

False teachers still distort the truth.

Religious pride still threatens genuine humility.

Worldly standards of success still influence Christian thinking.

And the temptation to trust human ability rather than divine grace remains as powerful as ever.

The modern church has access to resources that previous generations could scarcely have imagined.

We possess advanced technology, extensive educational opportunities, immediate communication, sophisticated organizational systems, and unprecedented means of distributing biblical teaching.

Yet none of these achievements can replace the spiritual power that comes from God.

Technology cannot regenerate the human heart.

Financial prosperity cannot produce holiness.

Religious popularity cannot guarantee doctrinal faithfulness.

A large congregation is not necessarily a spiritually mature congregation.

An impressive ministry is not necessarily an approved ministry.

And the applause of the world is not proof of the favor of God.

Second Corinthians directs our attention away from the superficial measurements of human success and toward the eternal standards of divine truth.

It reminds us that the strength of the church does not ultimately rest in its institutions, personalities, or earthly resources.

The strength of the church rests in Jesus Christ.

The same Savior who sustained Paul remains the Head of His church today.

The same gospel that transformed sinners in Corinth remains the power of God unto salvation.

The same Holy Spirit who empowered the apostles continues to work in the lives of God's people.

And the same grace that upheld Paul through unimaginable trials remains sufficient for every believer who belongs to Christ.

The world may change.

Civilizations may rise and fall.

Human institutions may prosper and collapse.

But the Word of God stands forever.

XII. Before We Turn the First Page

As we prepare to enter the inspired text of Second Corinthians, we must approach it with more than intellectual curiosity.

We must approach it with humility.

The purpose of studying Scripture is not merely to increase our knowledge of biblical history, theological terminology, or ancient Christian controversies.

Such knowledge is valuable, but it must lead us toward something greater.

It must lead us toward a deeper understanding of God.

It must expose the weakness of human pride.

It must strengthen our confidence in the gospel.

It must correct our misunderstandings concerning suffering, ministry, faithfulness, and spiritual maturity.

And above all, it must direct our hearts toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

Within these thirteen chapters, we will encounter the God of all comfort.

We will examine the glory of the new covenant.

We will discover the treasure hidden within earthen vessels.

We will consider the eternal hope that triumphs over earthly affliction.

We will explore the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to the people of God.

We will confront the necessity of holiness in a compromising world.

We will examine the grace of sacrificial giving.

We will witness Paul's defense of genuine Christian ministry against the claims of false apostles.

We will stand beside him as he pleads for the removal of his thorn.

And we will hear the Lord's answer:

"My grace is sufficient for thee."

These are not merely words from an ancient religious document.

They are the inspired revelation of the living God.

They speak to every believer who has discovered the limitations of human strength.

They offer encouragement to those who have grown weary in well-doing.

They challenge those who have placed their confidence in worldly success.

They confront those who have compromised the truth.

They comfort those who are suffering.

And they remind the church that the power of God is never dependent upon the greatness of man.

Perhaps you are beginning this study during a season of extraordinary blessing.

Perhaps your faith is strong, your circumstances are favorable, and your heart is filled with thanksgiving.

If so, may these pages deepen your humility and strengthen your gratitude.

Or perhaps you are entering this study during one of the darkest seasons of your life.

Perhaps your prayers seem unanswered.

Perhaps your strength has nearly disappeared.

Perhaps you have been wounded by people you trusted.

Perhaps the future appears uncertain, and you are struggling to understand what God is doing.

If that is your condition, the message of Second Corinthians is especially precious.

Your suffering has not placed you outside the reach of divine mercy.

Your weakness has not disqualified you from the sustaining power of Christ.

Your circumstances have not overturned the promises of God.

The Lord who comforted Paul remains the God of all comfort.

The Savior who sustained the apostle remains sufficient for you.

And the grace that carried him through every trial has not lost its power.

XIII. The Strength Behind the Suffering

There is one final truth we must establish before beginning our journey through this remarkable epistle.

Second Corinthians is not ultimately a book about the greatness of the Apostle Paul.

It is a book about the greatness of Jesus Christ.

Paul's sufferings matter because they reveal the sustaining grace of his Savior.

His endurance matters because it demonstrates the faithfulness of God.

His ministry matters because it proclaims the glorious gospel.

His weakness matters because it provides the setting in which the power of Christ is magnified.

The apostle was never the treasure.

He was the vessel.

He was never the source of the light.

He was a servant through whom the light was proclaimed.

He was never the foundation of salvation.

He pointed sinners toward the only foundation that can never be moved.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the center of the message.

Christ is the One who became poor that we might become rich through His grace.

Christ is the One who died for sinners and rose again.

Christ is the One through whom reconciliation with God is made possible.

Christ is the One whose righteousness becomes the standing of those who believe.

Christ is the One whose resurrection guarantees the hope of eternal life.

And Christ is the One whose strength is perfected in weakness.

Everything in Second Corinthians ultimately directs us toward Him.

Therefore, as we proceed, let us remember that the highest purpose of biblical commentary is not to exalt the commentator, but to illuminate the inspired text and magnify the Savior revealed within it.

May every chapter bring us closer to the truth.

May every passage increase our reverence for the Word of God.

May every doctrinal lesson strengthen our confidence in Jesus Christ.

And may every practical application encourage us to live faithfully before the Lord.

For the greatest need of the Christian is not to become sufficient in himself.

It is to discover more fully the sufficiency of Christ.

The Final Word Before the Journey Begins

The Apostle Paul entered Corinth preaching a crucified and risen Savior.

He labored among the people with love.

He endured their failures with patience.

He confronted their sins with courage.

He suffered their rejection with tears.

And through it all, he discovered that the Lord who had called him would never fail to supply the grace necessary to fulfill his divine assignment.

His testimony still speaks.

It speaks to the preacher standing behind a pulpit with a burdened heart.

It speaks to the Christian carrying responsibilities beyond personal ability.

It speaks to the believer who has experienced rejection, disappointment, or loss.

It speaks to the church struggling to remain faithful in an increasingly hostile culture.

It speaks to everyone who has discovered that earthly strength is temporary and human resources are limited.

The message is simple, but its implications are eternal:

God does not require His servants to possess unlimited strength. He calls them to depend upon the One whose power has no limit.

The vessel may be fragile.

The burden may be heavy.

The opposition may be fierce.

The road may be long.

The thorn may remain.

But the grace of God will never be insufficient for the purpose He has ordained.

And when the strength of man has been exhausted, the power of Christ remains undiminished.

With this understanding, we now turn to the opening words of the Apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

There, before the discussion of apostolic authority, before the examination of suffering, before the defense of ministry, and before the revelation concerning the thorn in the flesh, we encounter the glorious declaration that establishes the foundation of everything that follows:

> **"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort."**
>
> — 2 Corinthians 1:3 (KJV)

Here our journey begins.

Not with the strength of man.

Not with the wisdom of the world.

Not with the achievements of the church.

But with the eternal, faithful, sovereign, and merciful God whose grace is sufficient for every weakness.

For the believer's greatest strength is found not in what he possesses, but in the One to whom he belongs.

And His name is Jesus Christ.

Dr. Paul Crawford
Power in Weakness: God's Strength in a Broken World
A Comprehensive Verse-by-Verse Commentary on Second Corinthians

Soli Deo Gloria — To God Alone Be the Glory

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 1 — God of All Comfort and Faithfulness

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians is Paul's most personal letter.
In 1 Corinthians, Paul corrected a troubled church.
In 2 Corinthians, he opens his heart.
Between the two letters, much had happened.
Paul had made a painful visit to Corinth.
He had written a sorrowful letter that cost him many tears.
He had suffered terrible danger in Asia.
And some in Corinth were questioning his character and his authority.
They said he was unreliable because he changed his travel plans.
They said he was weak and unimpressive.
So Paul writes to explain his heart, to defend his ministry, and to call the church back to faithfulness.
Chapter 1 begins with one of the most comforting passages in the Bible.
“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.”
Paul had been through suffering so heavy that he despaired of life.
But in the middle of it, he discovered God's comfort.
And he learned that God comforts us so that we can comfort others.
Then Paul answers the charge that he was fickle.
He had changed his plans, but not because he was unreliable.
He wanted to spare them another painful visit.
And he points to the One who is never unreliable.
Every promise of God is **“Yes”** in Jesus Christ.
God Himself makes believers stand firm, anoints them, seals them, and gives them His Spirit as a guarantee.
The chapter moves through seven movements:

- Greeting and Blessing (verses 1–2).
- The God of Comfort (verses 3–7).
- Deliverance from Despair (verses 8–11).
- Paul's Integrity and God's Faithfulness (verses 12–14).
- Paul's Change of Plans (verses 15–20).
- Sealed by the Spirit (verses 21–22).

- Paul's Pastoral Heart (verses 23–24).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 1 is:

The God of all comfort carries His people through suffering so that they can comfort others, and the faithful God who keeps every promise in Christ seals His people with His Spirit and makes them stand firm.

I. PAUL AND TIMOTHY

2 Corinthians 1:1 — To the Church of God in Corinth

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia:”

Paul opens the way he opened his first letter.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”

Some in Corinth were questioning Paul's authority.

So from the first line, Paul reminds them that his calling came from God.

“And Timothy our brother.”

Timothy had visited Corinth and knew the church well.

“To the church of God in Corinth.”

Even after all its problems, it was still **the church of God.**

“Together with all the saints throughout Achaia.”

This letter was also for believers in the surrounding region.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:1
Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

Acts 18:1
After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

Romans 1:1
Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called by God to be an apostle and set apart to share God's good news.

Spiritual Principle

God's call, not human approval, is the foundation of ministry.

Key Truth

A struggling church is still God's church.

II. GRACE AND PEACE

2 Corinthians 1:2 — From God Our Father

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

Paul gives his familiar greeting.

Grace is God's undeserved favor.

Peace is the wholeness that comes when we are right with God.

Grace always comes first.
Peace flows from it.
This greeting was especially meaningful to a church where relationships had been strained.
Paul's first words to them are words of blessing.

Cross References

Romans 1:7
May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.
Galatians 1:3
May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.
Philippians 1:2
I pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will give you grace and peace.

Spiritual Principle

God's grace is the source of all true peace.

III. THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

2 Corinthians 1:3 — The Father of Mercies

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.”
Paul begins with praise.
“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Even after terrible suffering, Paul's first instinct is to praise God.
Then he gives God two beautiful names.
“The Father of mercies.”
God is the source of all mercy.
Mercy flows from Him like water from a spring.
“The God of all comfort.”
The word **comfort** means to come alongside someone to strengthen and encourage them.
This word and its forms appear ten times in verses 3–7.
Paul cannot stop talking about God's comfort.
He had experienced it deeply.

Cross References

Ephesians 1:3
Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.
1 Peter 1:3
Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
Romans 15:5
May God, who gives endurance and encouragement, help you live in harmony with one another as you follow Christ Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

God is the Father of mercies and the source of all true comfort.

Key Truth

Suffering did not make Paul stop praising God.
It taught him new reasons to praise.

IV. COMFORTED TO COMFORT

2 Corinthians 1:4 — In All Our Troubles

“He comforts us in all our troubles, so that we may be able to comfort those in any trouble with the same comfort we ourselves receive from God.”
This verse gives one of the great purposes of suffering.
“He comforts us in all our troubles.”
God does not always remove our troubles.
But He comforts us in them.
“So that we may be able to comfort those in any trouble.”
God's comfort is not meant to stop with us.
It is meant to flow through us to others.
“With the same comfort we ourselves receive from God.”
The comfort we pass on is the comfort we have received.
Those who have suffered and been comforted by God are uniquely able to comfort others.
Your pain can become someone else's help.

Cross References

Isaiah 51:12
> “I, yes I, am the One who comforts you. So why are you afraid of human beings, who die and are like grass?”

John 14:16
> And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper to be with you forever.

1 Thessalonians 4:18
> So encourage one another with these words.

Spiritual Principle

God comforts us so that we can comfort others.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Comfort received is comfort to be shared.

Application

Think of a hard time when God comforted you.
Who is going through something similar now that you could encourage?

V. SUFFERINGS AND COMFORT OVERFLOW

2 Corinthians 1:5 — Through Christ

“For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort abounds.”
Paul explains the connection between suffering and comfort.
“The sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives.”
Believers share in the sufferings of Christ.
When we suffer for following Him, we are walking the path He walked.
The world that rejected Him rejects His people too.
“So also through Christ our comfort abounds.”
But the comfort is greater than the suffering.
Through Christ, comfort overflows.
The more we suffer for Him, the more we experience His comfort.

Cross References

Philippians 3:10
> I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, to share in His sufferings, and to become like Him in His death,

Colossians 1:24
> Now I rejoice in what I suffer for you. In my body I am doing my part to share in Christ's sufferings for the sake of His body, the church.

Romans 8:17
> And if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—if we share in His sufferings so that we may also share in His glory.

Spiritual Principle

Those who share in Christ's sufferings also share in His overflowing comfort.

VI. FOR YOUR COMFORT AND SALVATION

2 Corinthians 1:6 — Patient Endurance

“If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.”
Paul shows that his experiences were not just about him.
“If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation.”
Paul's suffering helped bring the gospel to them.
“If we are comforted, it is for your comfort.”
When God comforted Paul, Paul could pass that comfort on to them.
“Which produces in you patient endurance.”
God's comfort does not make suffering disappear.
It gives the strength to endure it.

Whatever happened to Paul, God used it for the good of the church.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 4:15
> All this is for your good, so that as God's grace reaches more and more people, it will cause more thanksgiving and bring glory to God.

Colossians 1:24
> Now I rejoice in what I suffer for you. In my body I am doing my part to share in Christ's sufferings for the sake of His body, the church.

2 Timothy 2:10
> So I endure everything for the sake of God's chosen people, so that they too may receive the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Spiritual Principle

God uses both our trials and our comfort to bless others.

VII. OUR HOPE FOR YOU IS FIRM

2 Corinthians 1:7 — Sharing Suffering and Comfort

“And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you will share in our comfort.”
Paul expresses confidence in the Corinthians.
“Our hope for you is firm.”
Despite all the trouble, Paul had not given up on them.
“Just as you share in our sufferings.”
The Corinthians also suffered for their faith.
“So also you will share in our comfort.”
Suffering and comfort go together.
Those who share one will share the other.

Cross References

Romans 8:17
> And if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—if we share in His sufferings so that we may also share in His glory.

1 Peter 4:13
> But be glad that you share in Christ's sufferings, so that you will be full of joy when His glory is revealed.

Philippians 1:7
> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart. Whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the good news, all of you share with me in God's grace.

Spiritual Principle

Those who share in suffering for Christ will also share in His comfort.

Key Truth

You are never alone in your suffering.

Others share it, and God comforts in it.

VIII. BURDENED BEYOND OUR STRENGTH

2 Corinthians 1:8 — Despairing of Life

“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be unaware of the troubles we faced in Asia. We were burdened beyond our strength, so that we even despaired of life.”
Paul now opens his heart.
“The troubles we faced in Asia.”
Paul does not tell us exactly what happened.
It may have been connected to the riot in Ephesus, a serious illness, or another deadly danger.
Whatever it was, it was crushing.
“We were burdened beyond our strength.”
More than he could carry.
“So that we even despaired of life.”
Paul thought he was going to die.
This is an honest confession from a great apostle.
Faithful believers can face times when they feel completely overwhelmed.
That is not a sign of weak faith.
It is part of living in a broken world.

Cross References

Acts 19:23
About that time a great disturbance broke out about the Way.
1 Corinthians 15:32
If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what did I gain? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”
2 Corinthians 4:8
We are pressed on every side, but not crushed. We are confused, but not in despair.

Spiritual Principle

Even faithful believers can face trials that feel beyond their strength.

Application

If you feel crushed right now, you are not alone.
Paul felt that way too, and God carried him through.

IX. THE SENTENCE OF DEATH

2 Corinthians 1:9 — Relying on God Who Raises the Dead

“Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.”

Paul felt like a man condemned to die.
“We felt we had received the sentence of death.”
Then he tells us why God allowed it.
“But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves.”
Paul was strong, gifted, and experienced.
But God brought him to the end of himself.
“But on God who raises the dead.”
When there was no human hope left, Paul learned to trust the God who brings life out of death.
Sometimes God allows us to reach the end of our strength so that we will discover His.

Cross References

Romans 4:17
He is the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that did not exist.
Deuteronomy 32:39
See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me. I put to death and I bring to life. I wound and I heal, and no one can rescue anyone from My hand.
John 5:21
For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to whomever He wants.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes brings us to the end of ourselves so that we will rely on Him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When you reach the end of your strength, you are at the beginning of God's.

X. HE WILL DELIVER US AGAIN

2 Corinthians 1:10 — Past, Present, and Future

“He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us again. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us,”
Paul looks at God's deliverance in three directions.
The past.
“He has delivered us from such a deadly peril.”
God rescued Paul.
The future.
“He will deliver us again.”
God would rescue him again.
The ongoing present.
“He will continue to deliver us.”
Paul's hope was set on God.
What God has done in the past gives us confidence for what He will do in the future.

Cross References

Psalm 34:19
The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD rescues him from them all.

Daniel 3:17

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your power, O king.

2 Timothy 4:18

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Spiritual Principle

God's past faithfulness gives us hope for the future.

Application

Remember a time God delivered you.
Let it give you hope for what you face now.

XI. THE PRAYERS OF MANY

2 Corinthians 1:11 — Helping by Prayer

“as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”
Paul shows how the church can be part of God's deliverance.
“As you help us by your prayers.”
Prayer is real help.
The Corinthians could not travel with Paul.
But they could pray for him.
And their prayers made a difference.
“Then many will give thanks.”
When God answers the prayers of many, many give thanks.
Prayer unites the church.
And answered prayer multiplies praise to God.

Cross References

Philippians 1:19

For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will lead to my rescue.

Romans 15:30

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love the Spirit gives, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Ephesians 6:18

Pray in the Spirit at all times with every kind of prayer and request. Stay alert and keep praying for all of God's people.

Spiritual Principle

Prayer is a real way of helping others, and answered prayer brings thanksgiving.

Application

Who can you help this week through prayer?

XII. OUR BOAST

2 Corinthians 1:12 — Integrity and Godly Sincerity

“Now this is our boast: our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so not by worldly wisdom but by the grace of God.”
Paul now begins to answer the charges against him.
“Our conscience testifies.”
Paul's conscience was clear.
“We have conducted ourselves... with integrity and godly sincerity.”
Integrity—being the same inside and out.
Sincerity—pure motives, with nothing hidden.
“Especially in our relations with you.”
The Corinthians knew how Paul had lived among them.
“Not by worldly wisdom but by the grace of God.”
Paul did not use clever tricks or manipulation.
He relied on God's grace.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 2:4
> My message and my preaching did not depend on wise and persuasive words, but on a display of the Spirit's power.

Acts 24:16
> So I always work hard to keep a clear conscience before God and before people.

2 Corinthians 4:2
> Instead, we have refused to use secret and shameful methods. We do not use tricks, and we do not twist God's word. Instead, by plainly telling the truth, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Spiritual Principle

A clear conscience comes from living with integrity and relying on God's grace.

Key Truth

The best defense against false accusation is a life of integrity.

XIII. NOTHING HIDDEN

2 Corinthians 1:13 — What You Can Read and Understand

“For we write nothing to you beyond what you can read and understand. And I trust that you will understand fully,”
Some may have accused Paul of saying one thing in his letters and meaning another.
Paul says no.
“We write nothing to you beyond what you can read and understand.”
There were no hidden meanings.

No secret agendas.
What he wrote is what he meant.
“And I trust that you will understand fully.”
Paul hoped they would see his heart clearly.

Cross References

Ephesians 3:4
When you read this, you will be able to understand my insight into the secret truth about Christ.
2 Corinthians 3:2
You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone.
1 John 5:13
I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Spiritual Principle

Honest communication has no hidden meanings.

XIV. IN THE DAY OF THE LORD JESUS

2 Corinthians 1:14 — Boasting in One Another

“as you have already understood in part, that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.”
Paul looks ahead to the day Christ returns.
“As you have already understood in part.”
Some of the Corinthians already understood Paul's heart.
“That you can boast of us just as we will boast of you.”
Paul wanted a relationship of mutual joy.
He would be proud of them.
They could be proud of him.
“In the day of the Lord Jesus.”
On that day, everything will be clear.
Faithful servants and faithful churches will rejoice together.

Cross References

Philippians 2:16
as you hold firmly to the word of life. Then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or work for nothing.
1 Thessalonians 2:19
For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown we will boast about before our Lord Jesus when He comes? Isn't it you?
2 Corinthians 5:12
We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again. Instead, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us, so that you can answer those who take pride in outward appearance rather than in what is in the heart.

Spiritual Principle

Relationships in the church should be lived in light of Christ's return.

XV. A DOUBLE BLESSING

2 Corinthians 1:15 — Paul's Original Plan

“Because of this confidence, I planned to visit you first, so that you might benefit twice:”
Paul now explains his change of plans.
“Because of this confidence.”
Paul was confident in his relationship with them.
“I planned to visit you first.”
His original plan was to come to Corinth before going anywhere else.
“So that you might benefit twice.”
He wanted to visit them two times.
He wanted to bless them, not avoid them.

Cross References

Romans 1:11
I long to see you so that I can share some spiritual gift with you to make you strong.
Romans 15:29
I know that when I come to you, I will come with the full blessing of Christ.
1 Corinthians 16:5
I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, because I plan to travel through Macedonia.

Spiritual Principle

A loving leader plans with the good of others in mind.

XVI. TO MACEDONIA AND BACK

2 Corinthians 1:16 — On to Judea

“once on my way to Macedonia and then again on my return from Macedonia, so you could send me on my way to Judea.”
Paul describes his plan.
First visit: Stop in Corinth on the way north to Macedonia.
Second visit: Stop again on the way back.
Then: Have the Corinthians help send him on to Judea with the collection for the poor.
It was a good plan.
But it did not happen as he hoped.

Cross References

Acts 19:21
After all this happened, Paul decided, led by the Spirit, to travel through Macedonia and Achaia and then go to Jerusalem. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must also visit Rome.”

1 Corinthians 16:5
I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, because I plan to travel through Macedonia.
Romans 15:25
But now I am on my way to Jerusalem to serve God's people there.

Spiritual Principle

Good plans sometimes change, and that is not always a sign of failure.

XVII. WAS I FICKLE?

2 Corinthians 1:17 — Yes, Yes and No, No

“Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner, so that in the same breath I say “Yes, yes” and “No, no”?”
Paul now faces the accusation.
“Was I fickle?”
Some said Paul could not be trusted.
He said he would come, and then he did not.
“Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner?”
Did Paul make plans selfishly, changing them whenever it suited him?
“So that in the same breath I say ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’?”
Was his word worthless?
Paul's answer will be **no.**
His plans changed, but his heart did not.

Cross References

James 1:8
Such a person is double-minded and unstable in everything he does.
Matthew 5:37
Simply let your “Yes” mean yes, and your “No” mean no. Anything more than this comes from the evil one.
James 4:13
Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, do business, and make money.”

Spiritual Principle

Believers should be people whose word can be trusted.

Application

When you say yes, do you mean it?
Can people depend on your word?

XVIII. AS SURELY AS GOD IS FAITHFUL

2 Corinthians 1:18 — Not Yes and No

“But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.””
Paul appeals to God's own character.
“As surely as God is faithful.”
God never breaks His word.
“Our message to you is not ‘Yes’ and ‘No.’”
Paul's message about Christ was not uncertain or changing.
If they doubted his travel plans, they should not doubt his message.
The gospel he preached was as reliable as God Himself.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:9
God is faithful. He has called you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
1 Thessalonians 5:24
The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.
Numbers 23:19
God is not a man, that He should lie, or a human being, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not keep His promise?

Spiritual Principle

God's faithfulness is the foundation of a trustworthy message.

XIX. IN HIM IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN YES

2 Corinthians 1:19 — The Son of God

“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me, Silvanus, and Timothy, was not “Yes” and “No,” but in Him it has always been “Yes.””
Paul points to Jesus.
“The Son of God, Jesus Christ.”
This was the One Paul preached.
“Who was preached among you by me, Silvanus, and Timothy.”
Silvanus is another name for Silas, who traveled with Paul.
These three brought the gospel to Corinth.
“Was not ‘Yes’ and ‘No,’ but in Him it has always been ‘Yes.’”
Jesus is completely reliable.
He never changes.
He never breaks His word.
In Him, God's answer is always **yes.**

Cross References

Hebrews 13:8
Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Revelation 3:14

Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the ruler of God's creation.

Galatians 1:8

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a good news different from the one we preached to you, let that person be under God's curse!

Spiritual Principle

Jesus Christ is completely faithful and never changes.

XX. ALL GOD'S PROMISES ARE YES

2 Corinthians 1:20 — And Through Him the Amen

“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through Him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.”
This is one of the greatest verses in the Bible.
“No matter how many promises God has made.”
The Bible is full of God's promises.
Forgiveness.
Eternal life.
His presence.
His provision.
A new heaven and a new earth.
“They are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”
Every one of them is confirmed and fulfilled in Jesus.
He is the guarantee that God will keep every promise.
“And so through Him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us.”
Amen means **“It is true! So be it!”**
When we hear God's promises in Christ, we answer, **“Amen!”**
“To the glory of God.”
God is glorified when His people trust His promises.

Cross References

Romans 15:8

For I tell you that Christ became a servant of the Jewish people to show that God is truthful, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs.

Revelation 3:14

Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the ruler of God's creation.

2 Peter 1:4

Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in God's nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Spiritual Principle

Every promise of God finds its “Yes” in Jesus Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God says “Yes” in Christ; we say “Amen” in faith.

Application

What promise of God do you need to say “Amen” to today?

XXI. GOD MAKES US STAND FIRM

2 Corinthians 1:21 — He Anointed Us

“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us,”
Paul now describes what God does for every believer.
“It is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.”
Our stability does not come from ourselves.
God establishes us.
He makes us firm.
Notice **“both us and you.”**
Paul and the Corinthians were held by the same God.
“He anointed us.”
In the Old Testament, kings, priests, and prophets were anointed with oil to set them apart for God's service.
Every believer has been anointed with the Holy Spirit.
We are set apart for God.

Cross References

1 John 2:20
> But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

1 John 2:27
> As for you, the anointing you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. His anointing teaches you about everything, and it is true, not a lie. So just as it has taught you, remain in Him.

Ephesians 1:13
> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the good news of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

God Himself makes His people stand firm and sets them apart by His Spirit.

XXII. SEALED AND GUARANTEED

2 Corinthians 1:22 — The Spirit in Our Hearts

“set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee of what is to come.”
Paul continues the list of what God has done.
“Set His seal of ownership on us.”

In the ancient world, a seal marked something as belonging to its owner.
It also protected it.
God has marked every believer as His own.
“And put His Spirit in our hearts.”
The Holy Spirit lives in every believer.
“As a guarantee of what is to come.”
The word Paul uses was used for a down payment.
It was the first installment that guaranteed the rest would be paid.
The Spirit in us now is God's promise that the full inheritance is coming.
Notice the Trinity in verses 21–22.
God establishes us **in Christ** and gives us **the Spirit.**

Cross References

Ephesians 1:13
> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the good news of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30
> Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Romans 8:16
> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Spiritual Principle

The Holy Spirit is God's seal of ownership and His guarantee of our future.

Key Truth

If you belong to Christ, you are marked as God's own, and your future is secure.

XXIII. TO SPARE YOU

2 Corinthians 1:23 — God as My Witness

“I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.”
Paul gives the real reason he changed his plans.
“I call God as my witness.”
This is a solemn statement.
Paul is speaking before God.
“It was to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.”
Paul did not stay away because he was fickle.
He stayed away out of love.
His last visit had been painful.
If he had come again too soon, he would have had to correct them harshly.
He gave them time to repent instead.

Cross References

Romans 1:9
God, whom I serve with my whole heart by preaching the good news about His Son, is my witness that I always remember you in my prayers.
Galatians 1:20
I assure you before God that what I am writing to you is not a lie.
Philippians 1:8
God is my witness how much I long for all of you with the deep love of Christ Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes love chooses to wait rather than to confront too soon.

XXIV. WORKERS FOR YOUR JOY

2 Corinthians 1:24 — Not Lording It Over Your Faith

“Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith that you stand firm.”
Paul explains the kind of leader he is.
“Not that we lord it over your faith.”
Paul did not want to control them.
He was not a dictator.
“But we work with you for your joy.”
He saw himself as a fellow worker.
His goal was their joy.
“Because it is by faith that you stand firm.”
Their faith rested on God, not on Paul.
A true spiritual leader does not make people dependent on himself.
He helps them stand firm in their own faith in Christ.

Cross References

1 Peter 5:3
Do not act like rulers over those in your care, but be examples to the flock.
Philippians 1:25
Since I am sure of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.
Romans 15:13
May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

Godly leaders serve the joy and faith of others; they do not control them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A true shepherd works for the joy of the flock, not for power over it.

XXV. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 1

1. God Is the Source of All Comfort

“The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.”

Principle:

His mercy enables us to endure trials and equips us to comfort others.

2. Trials Drive Us to Rely on God

“That we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.”

Principle:

Paul's despair taught him to trust the One who raises the dead.

3. Prayer Unites the Church

“As you help us by your prayers.”

Principle:

The intercession of many brings thanksgiving for God's deliverance.

4. Christ Is the Fulfillment of God's Promises

“No matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”

Principle:

Every promise of God finds its “Yes” in Jesus.

5. The Holy Spirit Is Our Guarantee

“Put His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

Principle:

God has sealed us, marking us as His own and securing our eternal hope.

6. Leaders Are Servants, Not Rulers

“Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy.”

Principle:

Paul came not to dominate but to help the church stand firm in faith.

XXVI. THE BACKGROUND OF 2 CORINTHIANS

Understanding what happened between Paul's two letters helps us read 2 Corinthians.

Paul Wrote 1 Corinthians

He wrote from Ephesus to correct many problems in the church.

A Painful Visit

Paul later made a short, painful visit to Corinth.
It seems someone in the church opposed him openly.

A Sorrowful Letter

Paul then wrote a severe letter with many tears, calling the church to repentance.

Danger in Asia

Paul faced a deadly crisis in Asia.

Waiting for News

Paul waited anxiously to hear how the Corinthians had responded.
Titus finally brought good news: many had repented.

2 Corinthians Is Written

Paul wrote this letter to express his joy, explain his heart, and prepare for another visit.
He also warned against false teachers who were attacking his ministry.

Key Truth

2 Corinthians is the letter of a pastor's heart, written through tears, trials, and hope.

XXVII. THE CIRCLE OF COMFORT

Verses 3–7 describe how God's comfort works.

God Comforts Us

He is the God of all comfort.

In All Our Troubles

No trouble is too great or too small for His comfort.

So We Can Comfort Others

The comfort we receive is meant to be passed on.

With the Same Comfort

We share what God has given us.

Which Produces Endurance

God's comfort gives strength to keep going.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's comfort is meant to flow in a circle: from God, to us, through us, to others, and back to God in praise.

XXVIII. WHAT GOD DOES FOR EVERY BELIEVER

Verses 21–22 describe four things God has done for every believer.

He Makes Us Stand Firm

“It is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.”

He Anointed Us

We are set apart for His service.

He Sealed Us

We are marked as His own and protected.

He Gave Us His Spirit as a Guarantee

The Spirit is the down payment on our future inheritance.

Key Truth

Your security does not rest on your strength, but on what God has done for you in Christ.

XXIX. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 1 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

The Son of God

“The Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you.”

The One Whose Sufferings We Share

“The sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives.”

The One Through Whom Comfort Abounds

“Through Christ our comfort abounds.”

The Faithful One

“In Him it has always been ‘Yes.’”

The Fulfillment of Every Promise

“No matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jesus is God's “Yes” to every promise He has ever made.

XXX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What had happened between 1 and 2 Corinthians?
Paul made a painful visit, wrote a sorrowful letter, faced deadly danger in Asia, and then received good news that many in Corinth had repented.

Question 2

What does it mean that God is “the God of all comfort”?
God is the source of every kind of comfort.
He comes alongside His people to strengthen and encourage them in their troubles.

Question 3

Why does God comfort us?
So that we can comfort others with the same comfort we have received.

Question 4

What does it mean to share in “the sufferings of Christ”?
When believers suffer for following Christ, they walk the path He walked.
And through Christ, their comfort also overflows.

Question 5

What happened to Paul in Asia?
He faced a crisis so severe that he despaired of life.
Paul does not tell us exactly what it was.

Question 6

Why did God allow Paul to face such a terrible trial?
So that Paul would not rely on himself, but on God who raises the dead.

Question 7

How did the Corinthians help Paul?
By their prayers.
Prayer is real help, and answered prayer brings thanksgiving from many.

Question 8

Why did some say Paul was fickle?
He had changed his travel plans.
They said his word could not be trusted.

Question 9

Why did Paul really change his plans?
To spare them another painful visit.
He gave them time to repent.

Question 10

What does it mean that God's promises are “Yes” in Christ?
Every promise God has made is confirmed and fulfilled in Jesus.
He is the guarantee that God will keep His word.

Question 11

What does it mean that the Spirit is a “guarantee”?
The Spirit is like a down payment.
He is God's promise that the full inheritance is coming.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 1 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 1 should cause believers to live:

- Praising God even in hard times.
- Looking to God for comfort.
- Comforting others with the comfort they have received.
- Relying on God rather than themselves.
- Praying for one another.
- Keeping their word.
- Saying “Amen” to God's promises in Christ.
- Secure in God's seal and Spirit.

XXXI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 1 asks several important questions.

Do I Praise God in Hard Times?

Or does suffering silence my praise?

Where Do I Look for Comfort?

Do I go first to the God of all comfort?

Am I Passing Comfort On?

Who could I encourage with the comfort God has given me?

Am I Relying on Myself or on God?

What is God teaching me through my weakness?

Am I Praying for Others?

Who needs my prayers today?

Can People Trust My Word?

Does my “yes” mean yes?

Am I Trusting God's Promises?

What promise do I need to say “Amen” to?

Do I Know I Am Sealed by God?

Am I resting in the security God has given me?

XXXII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Comfort Flows Through Broken People”

Paul was not writing from a place of comfort.
He was writing from a place of pain.
He had despaired of life.
He had felt the sentence of death.
He had been misunderstood and criticized.
But in the middle of it all, he found the God of all comfort.
And he discovered something beautiful.
God's comfort does not stop with us.

It flows through us.
The person who has walked through grief can comfort the grieving.
The person who has known fear can comfort the fearful.
The person who has been rescued can give hope to those who need rescue.
Our wounds, healed by God, become channels of His comfort to others.
This creates a powerful principle.
God does not waste our pain.

Principle:

God comforts us in our troubles so that our healed wounds can bring His comfort to others.

XXXIII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 1 opens a letter written from a heart that had been through deep suffering.
Paul had been crushed.
He had been criticized.
He had been misunderstood.
But he had found three great truths.
God comforts.
He is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.
God delivers.
He raises the dead and rescues His people.
God keeps His promises.
Every promise is “Yes” in Christ.
2 Corinthians 1 therefore reminds us:
Never stop praising God, even in pain.
Never waste the comfort God gives you.
Never rely only on yourself.
Never stop praying for others.
Never doubt the promises of God.
The church does not need people who have never suffered.
It needs:
People comforted by God.
People who comfort others.
People who pray for one another.
And people who say “Amen” to every promise of God in Christ.
The same God still comforts:
Tell people that God is the Father of mercies.
Tell people that He raises the dead.
Tell people that every promise is “Yes” in Jesus.
Tell people that He seals His own with His Spirit.
And in every trouble:
Look to the God of all comfort.
Rely on Him who raises the dead.
Pass His comfort on.
Say “Amen” to His promises.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Blessed be Your name, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Thank You that You are the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.
Thank You that You comfort us in all our troubles.
Thank You that You do not waste our pain, but use it to help us comfort others.
Thank You that when we reach the end of our strength, You are the God who raises the dead.
Thank You that You have delivered us, You will deliver us, and You will continue to deliver us.
Thank You for the prayers of Your people.
Thank You that every promise You have made is “Yes” in Jesus Christ.
Thank You that You make us stand firm, that You have anointed us, sealed us, and given us Your Spirit as a guarantee.
Forgive us when we have relied on ourselves instead of You.
Forgive us when we have kept Your comfort to ourselves.
Forgive us when our word has not been trustworthy.
Comfort those who are suffering today.
Help those who feel crushed beyond their strength.
Make us comforters of others.
Teach us to pray for one another.
Make us people whose “yes” means yes.
And help us say “Amen” to every promise You have given us in Christ.
“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“He comforts us in all our troubles, so that we may be able to comfort those in any trouble with the same comfort we ourselves receive from God.” — 2 Corinthians 1:4

Central Truth

The God of all comfort carries His people through suffering so that they can comfort others, and the faithful God who keeps every promise in Christ seals His people with His Spirit and makes them stand firm.

2 Corinthians 1 in One Sentence

Paul praises the God of all comfort who comforted him in deadly trouble so that he could comfort others, explains that his change of plans came from love rather than fickleness, and points to the faithful God whose every promise is “Yes” in Christ and who seals His people with the Spirit.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 2 — Forgiveness, Triumph, and the Fragrance of Christ

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 2 continues Paul's explanation of why he did not come back to Corinth.
At the end of Chapter 1, Paul said he stayed away **“to spare you.”**
Now he opens his heart even more.
His last visit had been painful.
He did not want another visit filled with sorrow.
So instead of coming, he wrote a letter.
It was a hard letter.
He wrote it with tears.
But he did not write to hurt them.
He wrote to show how much he loved them.
The letter worked.
The church took action against a man who had caused great harm.
But now Paul was worried about something else.
The church had disciplined the man.
He had repented.
And now they needed to forgive him.
Paul knew that discipline without restoration could crush a person.
And he knew that Satan would use unforgiveness to divide the church.
Then Paul tells how restless he was while waiting for news.
Even with an open door for the gospel in Troas, he could not rest.
But suddenly he bursts into praise.
“Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”
Paul pictures a Roman victory parade.
God is the conquering King, and His servants march in His triumph.
Wherever they go, they spread the fragrance of Christ.
To some, it is the smell of death.
To others, it is the fragrance of life.
The chapter moves through four movements:

- Paul's Loving Restraint (verses 1–4).
- Forgiveness for the Offender (verses 5–11).
- Restlessness in Troas (verses 12–13).

- The Fragrance of Christ (verses 14–17).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 2 is:
Godly correction must lead to forgiveness and restoration, and those who serve Christ are led by God in His triumph, spreading the fragrance of Christ that brings life to some and judgment to others.

I. NOT AGAIN IN SORROW

2 Corinthians 2:1 — Paul's Decision

“I determined within myself not to come to you again in sorrow.”
Paul explains his decision.
“I determined within myself.”
This was a deliberate choice.
“Not to come to you again in sorrow.”
The word **again** tells us something important.
Paul had already made one sorrowful visit.
It had been painful for everyone.
He did not want to repeat it.
So he chose to wait.
This was not avoidance.
It was wisdom and love.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 1:23
I call God as my witness that it was to spare you that I did not come back to Corinth.
2 Corinthians 13:2
I already warned you when I was with you the second time, and I warn you again now that I am away: When I come again, I will not spare those who sinned before or any of the others.
2 Corinthians 12:21
I am afraid that when I come again, my God will humble me in front of you. I may have to grieve over many who sinned earlier and have not turned away from the impurity, sexual sin, and shameless living they took part in.

Spiritual Principle

Love sometimes chooses the timing of correction carefully.

II. WHO WILL BRING ME JOY?

2 Corinthians 2:2 — The Ones I Have Grieved

“For if I cause you grief, who then will bring me joy but the very ones I have grieved?”
Paul shows how closely his heart was tied to theirs.
“If I cause you grief.”
If Paul came and made them sad—
“Who then will bring me joy?”
The Corinthians were his source of joy.

If they were grieving, he would have no joy either.
Paul was not a cold leader handing out rebukes.
He was a spiritual father whose happiness was bound up with his children's.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 7:9
> Now I am glad, not because you were made sad, but because your sadness led you to turn away from sin. You became sad as God wanted, so you were not harmed by us in any way.

Philippians 2:2
> Make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, and being one in spirit and purpose.

Galatians 4:19
> My dear children, I am again going through the pain of childbirth for you until Christ is formed in you.

Spiritual Principle

A true shepherd's joy is tied to the well-being of the flock.

III. MY JOY IS YOUR JOY

2 Corinthians 2:3 — Why Paul Wrote

“I wrote as I did so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice. I have confidence that my joy is the joy of you all.”
Paul explains why he wrote a letter instead of coming in person.
“I wrote as I did.”
He wrote to give them time to set things right.
“So that when I came, I would not have sorrow.”
He hoped that when he finally came, the problems would already be solved.
“I have confidence that my joy is the joy of you all.”
Paul believed that what made him glad would make them glad too.
He trusted that, deep down, they wanted the same thing he did.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 7:13
> This is why we are encouraged. And besides our own encouragement, we were especially glad to see how happy Titus was, because all of you refreshed his spirit.

Galatians 5:10
> I am confident in the Lord that you will not take a different view. But whoever is troubling you will pay the penalty, whoever he is.

Philippians 1:25
> Since I am sure of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.

Spiritual Principle

Wise correction gives people time and opportunity to make things right.

IV. WITH MANY TEARS

2 Corinthians 2:4 — The Depth of My Love

“Out of great distress and anguish of heart, with many tears, I wrote to you—not to grieve you but to show you the depth of my love for you.”
This verse shows Paul's heart.
“Out of great distress and anguish of heart.”
Writing that letter was painful for Paul.
“With many tears.”
He wept as he wrote.
Paul was not angry and cold.
He was heartbroken.
“Not to grieve you.”
His goal was not to hurt them.
“But to show you the depth of my love for you.”
Hard words, spoken with tears, are an act of love.
Paul loved them too much to let them stay in sin.

Cross References

Acts 20:31
> So be on guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

2 Corinthians 7:8
> Even if my letter made you sad, I do not regret it. I did regret it at first, because I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while.

Jeremiah 9:1
> Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the people of my nation who have been killed.

Spiritual Principle

Loving correction is given with tears, not with anger.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Hard words spoken with a broken heart are an act of love.

V. NOT ME ALONE

2 Corinthians 2:5 — Grieving the Whole Church

“If anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me alone but to some extent all of you.”
Paul now turns to the man who caused the trouble.
“If anyone has caused grief.”
Paul does not name him.
Bible students are not sure who he was.
Some believe he was the man living in sin in 1 Corinthians 5.

Many believe he was someone who openly opposed and insulted Paul during his painful visit.
“He has not grieved me alone.”
Paul does not make it about himself.
“But to some extent all of you.”
This man's sin hurt the whole church.
Sin is never only private.
It affects the whole body.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 5:1
> It is actually reported that there is sexual sin among you of a kind that even unbelievers do not tolerate: a man is living with his father's wife.

2 Corinthians 7:12
> So even though I wrote to you, it was not mainly because of the one who did wrong or the one who was wronged. It was so that you could see for yourselves, before God, how devoted to us you really are.

Galatians 6:1
> Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should gently help that person back on the right path. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

Spiritual Principle

Sin in the church affects the whole body, not just one person.

Key Truth

Paul did not make the offense about his own hurt feelings.

VI. THE PUNISHMENT IS SUFFICIENT

2 Corinthians 2:6 — Enough

“The punishment inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man.”
The church had acted.
“The punishment inflicted by the majority.”
Most of the church had agreed to discipline the man.
Perhaps he had been removed from fellowship.
“Is sufficient for such a man.”
Paul says, **“That is enough.”**
The discipline had done its work.
The man had repented.
There was no need to keep punishing him.
Discipline has a purpose.
When that purpose is achieved, it must stop.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 5:5
> hand this man over to Satan so that his sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 25:3

> The judge may sentence him to no more than forty lashes. If he is beaten more than that, your fellow Israelite will be disgraced in your sight.

Matthew 18:17

> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would an unbeliever or a tax collector.

Spiritual Principle

Church discipline has limits; when it has done its work, it must end.

VII. FORGIVE AND COMFORT HIM

2 Corinthians 2:7 — Lest He Be Overwhelmed

“Instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”
Now Paul tells them what to do next.
“You ought to forgive.”
Release him from the debt of his sin.
“And comfort him.”
Come alongside him and encourage him.
This is the same word Paul used so often in Chapter 1.
The comfort God gave Paul, the church must now give this man.
“So that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”
The man was so sorry for his sin that he was in danger of being crushed.
Too much sorrow can lead to despair.
He might give up on God and the church altogether.
Forgiveness keeps repentance from turning into hopelessness.

Cross References

Galatians 6:1

> Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should gently help that person back on the right path. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

Ephesians 4:32

> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God forgave you in Christ.

Colossians 3:13

> Be patient with each other, and forgive anyone who has a complaint against you. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Spiritual Principle

When a sinner repents, the church must forgive and comfort, not keep punishing.

Application

Is there someone who has repented whom you have not yet fully forgiven?

VIII. REAFFIRM YOUR LOVE

2 Corinthians 2:8 — Make It Clear

“Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”
Paul gives one more instruction.
“Reaffirm your love for him.”
The word means to confirm officially or publicly.
The church had publicly disciplined him.
Now it should publicly welcome him back.
Forgiveness should be clear.
He needed to know he was loved and accepted again.
Private forgiveness is good.
But public restoration heals the wound fully.

Cross References

1 John 4:7
> Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Colossians 3:14
> And over all these, put on love, which ties everything together in perfect unity.

Philemon 1:7
> Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of God's people.

Spiritual Principle

Restoration should be as clear as the discipline was.

IX. A TEST OF OBEDIENCE

2 Corinthians 2:9 — The Reason I Wrote

“The reason I wrote was to test you and see if you would be obedient in everything.”
Paul explains another purpose for his letter.
“To test you.”
He wanted to see their response.
“And see if you would be obedient in everything.”
Would they follow God's word even when it was hard?
They had passed the first test by disciplining the offender.
Now they faced a second test:
Would they obey by forgiving him?
Obedience includes both correction and forgiveness.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:19
But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord wants me to. Then I will find out not only what these proud people are saying, but what power they really have.
2 Corinthians 10:6
And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience once your own obedience is complete.
2 Corinthians 13:5
Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Don't you realize that Jesus Christ is in you—unless you fail the test?

Spiritual Principle

Obedience to God includes both correcting sin and forgiving the repentant.

X. IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 2:10 — I Also Forgive

“If you forgive anyone, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the presence of Christ for your sake,”
Paul joins the church in forgiving.
“If you forgive anyone, I also forgive.”
Paul and the church stood together.
“If there was anything to forgive.”
Paul downplays his own hurt.
He does not want to make the matter about himself.
“I have forgiven in the presence of Christ.”
Paul forgave as one standing before Christ.
He remembered how much Christ had forgiven him.
“For your sake.”
His forgiveness was for the good of the church.

Cross References

Matthew 6:14
For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
Ephesians 4:32
Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God forgave you in Christ.
Luke 17:3
So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins, correct them. And if they repent, forgive them.

Spiritual Principle

We forgive others as people who stand in the presence of the Christ who forgave us.

Key Truth

Forgiveness is easier when we remember how much we have been forgiven.

XI. SATAN'S SCHEMES

2 Corinthians 2:11 — Not Unaware

“so that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”
Paul gives one more reason for forgiveness.
“So that Satan might not outwit us.”
Satan is always looking for an advantage.
If the church refused to forgive, Satan could use it.
He could drive the repentant man into despair.
He could divide the church through bitterness.
He could damage the church's witness.
“For we are not unaware of his schemes.”
Satan has strategies.
One of his favorites is to use unforgiveness to destroy relationships.
Forgiveness takes that weapon out of his hands.

Cross References

Ephesians 6:11
Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand firm against the devil's schemes.
1 Peter 5:8
Be alert and clear-minded. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.
Job 1:7
The LORD asked Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the LORD, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.”

Spiritual Principle

Unforgiveness gives Satan an opportunity; forgiveness takes it away.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Satan loves a church that will not forgive.

Application

Is unforgiveness giving the enemy a foothold in your life or relationships?

XII. AN OPEN DOOR IN TROAS

2 Corinthians 2:12 — To Preach the Gospel

“When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, the Lord opened a door for me,”
Paul now goes back to his story.
“When I came to Troas.”
Troas was a port city on the coast of Asia.
“To preach the gospel of Christ.”
Paul's purpose was always the gospel.

“The Lord opened a door for me.”
There was a real opportunity to reach people.
This was exactly what Paul usually longed for.

Cross References

Acts 20:5
These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas.
Colossians 4:3
At the same time, pray for us too, that God will open a door for our message, so that we can tell the secret truth about Christ, for which I am in chains.
1 Corinthians 16:9
because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

Spiritual Principle

God opens doors for the gospel, even in difficult seasons.

XIII. NO PEACE OF MIND

2 Corinthians 2:13 — Looking for Titus

“but I had no peace of mind because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.”
Even with an open door, Paul could not rest.
“I had no peace of mind.”
Paul was deeply anxious.
“Because I did not find my brother Titus there.”
Paul had sent Titus to Corinth with his sorrowful letter.
He was waiting for Titus to bring news of how the Corinthians had responded.
When Titus did not arrive, Paul's worry grew.
“So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.”
Paul left Troas to go and find Titus.
This shows how much Paul loved the Corinthians.
He could not focus on anything else until he knew they were all right.
It also shows that even great servants of God feel anxiety.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 7:5
When we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest. We faced trouble on every side—conflicts outside and fears inside.
Acts 20:1
When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and encouraged them. Then he said goodbye and set out for Macedonia.
2 Corinthians 8:16
Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you.

Spiritual Principle

Deep love for others can bring deep concern for them.

Key Truth

Paul was honest about his anxiety.
God's servants are not machines; they have hearts.

XIV. LED IN TRIUMPH

2 Corinthians 2:14 — Thanks Be to God

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.”
Suddenly Paul breaks into praise.
In Chapter 7, he will finish the story and tell how Titus finally arrived with good news.
But here he cannot wait to give thanks.
“Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”
Paul pictures a Roman **triumph.**
When a Roman general won a great victory, he led a grand parade through the city.
His soldiers marched behind him.
Captured enemies were led in the procession.
Incense was burned along the way, filling the streets with fragrance.
Paul says God is the victorious general.
And His servants are led in His triumphal procession.
Even when Paul felt anxious and weak, God was leading him in victory.
“And through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.”
Like incense filling the air, the knowledge of Christ spreads wherever God's servants go.

Cross References

Colossians 2:15
> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public show of them, leading them in a victory parade by the cross.

1 Corinthians 15:57
> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:2
> Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Spiritual Principle

God leads His servants in Christ's triumph, even when they feel weak.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Our feelings may say defeat, but God says triumph in Christ.

XV. THE SWEET FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 2:15 — To God

“For we are to God the sweet fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”
Paul continues the picture.
“For we are to God the sweet fragrance of Christ.”
When believers live for Christ and share the gospel, it is like a pleasing aroma to God.
Our lives and witness bring Him delight.
“Among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”
The fragrance spreads to everyone.
Some are being saved.
Some are perishing.
But to God, the fragrance is always pleasing.
Our faithfulness pleases God whether or not people respond.

Cross References

Ephesians 5:2
> Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Philippians 4:18
> I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, a sacrifice that God accepts and that pleases Him.

John 12:3
> Then Mary took about a pint of very expensive perfume made from pure nard. She poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. The whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful witness is pleasing to God, no matter how people respond.

Application

Does your life carry the fragrance of Christ?

XVI. DEATH AND LIFE

2 Corinthians 2:16 — Who Is Sufficient?

“To the one we are the smell of death leading to death; to the other, the fragrance of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?”
The same fragrance has two opposite effects.
“To the one we are the smell of death leading to death.”
In a Roman triumph, the incense meant victory for the soldiers.
But for the captives, it meant defeat and death.

To those who reject Christ, the gospel is a message of judgment.
“To the other, the fragrance of life leading to life.”
To those who believe, the gospel is the sweet smell of eternal life.
“And who is sufficient for these things?”
Paul feels the weight of this.
Who is adequate to carry a message with eternal consequences?
No one, in their own strength.
In the next chapter, Paul will answer:
“Our sufficiency comes from God.”

Cross References

2 Corinthians 3:5
> It is not that we are able to claim anything as coming from ourselves. Our ability comes from God.

John 5:24
> I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes the One who sent Me has eternal life. He will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

Luke 2:34
> Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother: “This child is set to cause the fall and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed,”

Spiritual Principle

The gospel brings life to those who believe and judgment to those who reject it.

Key Truth

No one is neutral toward the gospel.
It always leads somewhere.

XVII. NOT PEDDLERS OF GOD'S WORD

2 Corinthians 2:17 — With Sincerity

“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.”
Paul contrasts himself with false teachers.
“Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit.”
The word **peddle** was used for dishonest merchants.
Some sellers watered down their wine to make more money.
Some teachers did the same with God's word.
They changed it, softened it, or sold it for personal gain.
Paul refused to do that.
“In Christ we speak before God with sincerity.”
Paul spoke honestly, with pure motives.
“As those sent from God.”
He knew he was God's messenger.
And he knew God was watching.

Cross References

1 Thessalonians 2:5
As you know, we never used flattery, and we never put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.

2 Corinthians 4:2
Instead, we have refused to use secret and shameful methods. We do not use tricks, and we do not twist God's word. Instead, by plainly telling the truth, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Titus 1:11
They must be silenced, because they are upsetting whole families by teaching things they should not teach, and they do it for dishonest gain.

Spiritual Principle

God's word must be shared honestly, without watering it down or using it for personal gain.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Those who speak for God must speak as those who stand before God.

XVIII. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 2

1. Correction Must Lead to Restoration

“You ought to forgive and comfort him.”

Principle:

Discipline in the church is necessary, but forgiveness and love must follow to prevent overwhelming sorrow.

2. Satan Exploits Division

“So that Satan might not outwit us.”

Principle:

Unforgiveness gives Satan a foothold, but unity and grace disarm his schemes.

3. Ministry Is Partnership with God

“The Lord opened a door for me.”

Principle:

Even when Paul faced restlessness and discouragement, God opened doors for the gospel.

4. Christ Makes Us Victorious

“Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”

Principle:

Believers are led in triumph, not by their own power, but by Christ's work through them.

5. The Gospel Has a Dual Effect

“The smell of death leading to death... the fragrance of life leading to life.”

Principle:

To those who reject it, the gospel is a message of judgment; to those who believe, it is life eternal.

6. Authenticity Matters

“We do not peddle the word of God for profit.”

Principle:

True ministers of Christ do not corrupt God's word but speak with sincerity, knowing they stand before God.

XIX. DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION

2 Corinthians 2 completes the picture of church discipline.

1 Corinthians 5 — The Call to Discipline

The church must not ignore open, unrepentant sin.

2 Corinthians 2 — The Call to Restore

When the sinner repents, the church must forgive and welcome him back.

Five Steps of Restoration

- **Recognize** that the discipline has done its work.
- **Forgive** the repentant person.
- **Comfort** him so he is not crushed by sorrow.
- **Reaffirm** your love clearly and publicly.
- **Guard** against Satan's schemes of bitterness and division.

The Danger of Too Little Discipline

Sin spreads, and the church loses its holiness.

The Danger of Too Much Discipline

The repentant person is crushed, and Satan gains a foothold.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Discipline without restoration is cruelty; restoration without discipline is carelessness; God calls His church to both.

XX. THE ROMAN TRIUMPH

Paul's picture in verses 14–16 comes from a Roman victory parade.

The Victorious General

He rode in a chariot at the front of the procession.
In Paul's picture, God is the conqueror and Christ's victory is being celebrated.

The Procession

Soldiers and captives followed behind.
Paul sees God's servants as part of Christ's triumphal procession.

The Incense

Incense was burned along the way, filling the streets with fragrance.
The knowledge of Christ spreads like that fragrance.

Two Meanings of the Same Smell

For the victors, the incense meant life and celebration.
For the condemned captives, it meant death.
The gospel likewise brings life to some and judgment to others.

Key Truth

God's servants march in Christ's victory, spreading the fragrance of the gospel wherever they go.

XXI. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 2 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

We Forgive in His Presence

“I have forgiven in the presence of Christ.”

He Leads Us in Triumph

“Who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”

His Fragrance Spreads Through Us

“We are to God the sweet fragrance of Christ.”

The Gospel Is About Him

“To preach the gospel of Christ.”

We Speak in Him

“In Christ we speak before God with sincerity.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ's victory gives us triumph, His forgiveness teaches us to forgive, and His fragrance fills our witness.

XXII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did Paul decide not to visit Corinth again right away?
His last visit had been painful.
He did not want to come again in sorrow, so he gave them time to make things right.

Question 2

How did Paul feel when he wrote his sorrowful letter?
He wrote with great distress, anguish, and many tears.
He wrote not to hurt them, but to show his love.

Question 3

Who was the man who caused grief?
Paul does not name him.
Some believe he was the man from 1 Corinthians 5.
Many believe he was someone who openly opposed Paul during his painful visit.

Question 4

Why did Paul say the punishment was sufficient?
The discipline had done its work.
The man had repented, so there was no need to keep punishing him.

Question 5

What did Paul ask the church to do for the man?
Forgive him, comfort him, and reaffirm their love for him.

Question 6

Why is it dangerous not to forgive a repentant person?
He could be overwhelmed by sorrow and fall into despair.
And Satan could use unforgiveness to divide the church.

Question 7

What are Satan's schemes in this situation?
To use bitterness and unforgiveness to destroy the repentant person and divide the church.

Question 8

Why did Paul leave Troas even though the Lord had opened a door?
He had no peace because he had not found Titus.
He was anxious to hear how the Corinthians had responded to his letter.

Question 9

What picture does Paul use in verse 14?
A Roman victory parade, where incense filled the streets.
God leads His servants in Christ's triumph, spreading the fragrance of the gospel.

Question 10

How can the same gospel be both life and death?
To those who believe, it brings eternal life.
To those who reject it, it confirms their judgment.

Question 11

What does it mean to “peddle” the word of God?
To change it, water it down, or use it for personal profit.
Paul refused to do this.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 2 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 2 should cause believers to live:

- Correcting others with tears, not anger.
- Forgiving those who repent.
- Comforting those crushed by sorrow.
- Making forgiveness clear and complete.
- Watching for Satan's schemes of bitterness.
- Trusting that God leads them in triumph.
- Spreading the fragrance of Christ.
- Sharing God's word honestly and sincerely.

XXIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 2 asks several important questions.

How Do I Correct Others?

With anger, or with tears and love?

Is There Someone I Need to Forgive?

Someone who has repented, but I am still holding back?

Do I Make My Forgiveness Clear?

Or do I leave people unsure of where they stand?

Am I Giving Satan a Foothold?

Is bitterness or unforgiveness opening a door for him?

How Do I Handle Anxiety?

Do I bring my worries to God?

Do I Believe God Leads Me in Triumph?

Even when I feel weak?

Does My Life Carry the Fragrance of Christ?

What do people sense when they are around me?

Am I Honest with God's Word?

Do I share it faithfully, without watering it down?

XXIV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Forgiveness Closes the Door on Satan”

Satan cannot undo the cross.
He cannot take away a believer's salvation.
But he can try to destroy relationships.
And one of his favorite tools is unforgiveness.
When a church refuses to forgive, the repentant person is crushed.
When believers hold grudges, bitterness spreads.
When resentment grows, unity breaks.
And Satan gets what he wants.
But when believers forgive, something powerful happens.
The repentant are restored.
Relationships are healed.
Unity returns.
And Satan loses his foothold.
This creates a powerful principle.
Forgiveness is not only an act of love.
It is an act of spiritual warfare.

Principle:

Every time you forgive, you close a door that Satan wanted to open.

XXV. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 2 shows us a pastor's heart.
Paul corrected with tears.
He waited with patience.
He forgave freely.
He worried deeply.
And then he praised God for leading him in triumph.
The Corinthians had obeyed his call to discipline.
Now they needed to obey his call to forgive.
2 Corinthians 2 therefore reminds us:
Never correct without love.
Never discipline without hope of restoration.
Never withhold forgiveness from the repentant.
Never forget that Satan schemes to divide.
Never doubt that God leads His people in triumph.
The church does not need harsh judges or careless friends.
It needs:
Loving correction.
Generous forgiveness.
Watchful hearts.
And lives that carry the fragrance of Christ.
The same gospel still spreads:
Tell people that Christ has won the victory.
Tell people that God forgives the repentant.
Tell people that the gospel is the fragrance of life.
Tell people the truth, without watering it down.
And wherever you go:
Forgive freely.
Comfort the broken.
Walk in Christ's triumph.
Spread His fragrance.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for leaders who correct with love and tears.
Thank You for the gift of forgiveness.
Thank You that You forgive the repentant and comfort the broken.
Thank You that we are not unaware of Satan's schemes.
Thank You that You open doors for the gospel.
Thank You that You always lead us in triumph in Christ.
Thank You that through us You spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ.
Forgive us when we have corrected others without love.

Forgive us when we have held back forgiveness from those who have repented.
Forgive us when we have given Satan a foothold through bitterness.
Forgive us when we have doubted Your victory because we felt weak.
Help us forgive as You have forgiven us.
Help us comfort those who are overwhelmed by sorrow.
Help us make our love clear to those who need it.
Protect Your church from division and bitterness.
Fill our lives with the fragrance of Christ.
Make us honest and sincere with Your word.
And lead us in Christ's triumph wherever we go.
“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.” — 2 Corinthians 2:14

Central Truth

Godly correction must lead to forgiveness and restoration, and those who serve Christ are led by God in His triumph, spreading the fragrance of Christ that brings life to some and judgment to others.

2 Corinthians 2 in One Sentence

Paul explains that he wrote a tearful letter out of love, urges the church to forgive and restore the repentant offender so Satan cannot gain an advantage, and praises God who leads His servants in Christ's triumph, spreading the fragrance of the gospel through sincere and faithful ministry.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 3 — The New Covenant of the Spirit

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 3 is one of the richest chapters in the New Testament about the new covenant.
At the end of Chapter 2, Paul asked a question:
“Who is sufficient for these things?”
Who is able to carry a message that brings life to some and judgment to others?
In Chapter 3, Paul gives the answer.
“Our competence comes from God.”
But Paul begins with another issue.
False teachers had come to Corinth.
They carried letters of recommendation to prove they were important.
They criticized Paul because he had no such letters.
Paul answers that he does not need paper letters.
The Corinthians themselves are his letter.
Their changed lives were written by the Spirit of God.
Then Paul compares two covenants.
The old covenant was given through Moses.
It was written on tablets of stone.
It came with glory—so much that Moses' face shone.
But it could not give life.
It showed people their sin and brought condemnation.
And its glory was fading.
The new covenant comes through Christ.
It is written on human hearts by the Spirit.
It brings righteousness and life.
And its glory lasts forever.
Paul then uses the picture of Moses' veil.
Moses covered his face so the people would not see the glory fading away.
Paul says a veil still covers hearts when the old covenant is read without Christ.
But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.
And then something wonderful happens.
With unveiled faces, believers look at the glory of the Lord and are changed into His image, from glory to glory.
The chapter moves through five movements:

- The Living Epistle (verses 1–3).
- Sufficiency from God (verses 4–6).
- The Glory of the New Covenant (verses 7–11).
- The Veil Removed in Christ (verses 12–16).
- Liberty and Transformation (verses 17–18).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 3 is:
The new covenant of the Spirit is far more glorious than the old covenant of the letter, because it writes God's life on human hearts, removes the veil in Christ, and transforms believers into the image of the Lord.

I. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

2 Corinthians 3:1 — Do We Need Them?

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, like some others, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?”
Paul asks two questions.
“Do we begin again to commend ourselves?”
Paul has just spoken about his sincere ministry.
Some might say he was praising himself.
“Or do we need, like some others, letters of recommendation?”
In the early church, letters of recommendation were common and useful.
A traveling believer would carry a letter from his home church to introduce him.
But false teachers had come to Corinth with impressive letters.
They used them to make themselves look important and to cast doubt on Paul.
Paul asks, **“Do I really need a letter to introduce myself to you?”**
He had founded their church.

Cross References

Acts 18:27
> When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who had believed by God's grace.

Romans 16:1
> I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, who serves the church in Cenchreae.

2 Corinthians 5:12
> We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again. Instead, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us, so that you can answer those who take pride in outward appearance rather than in what is in the heart.

Spiritual Principle

A servant of God does not need to build himself up with human credentials.

II. YOU ARE OUR LETTER

2 Corinthians 3:2 — Written on Our Hearts

“You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone.”
Paul gives a beautiful answer.
“You yourselves are our letter.”
The Corinthian church itself was Paul's recommendation.
Their changed lives proved that his ministry was real.
“Written on our hearts.”
Paul carried them in his heart.
They were not just a ministry project to him.
They were people he loved.

“Known and read by everyone.”
People could see what God had done in Corinth.
The church was a public letter that everyone could read.

Cross References

Jeremiah 31:33
> “But this is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people.”

1 Corinthians 9:2
> Even if others do not see me as an apostle, surely you do! You are the proof that I am the Lord's apostle.

Philippians 1:7
> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart. Whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the good news, all of you share with me in God's grace.

Spiritual Principle

Changed lives are the best evidence of true ministry.

Key Truth

People are reading your life.
What does it say about Christ?

III. A LETTER FROM CHRIST

2 Corinthians 3:3 — Written by the Spirit

“It is clear that you are a letter from Christ, delivered through us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”
Paul takes the picture further.
“You are a letter from Christ.”
Christ is the true author.
“Delivered through us.”
Paul was only the messenger who delivered it.
“Written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.”
Ink fades.
The Spirit's work lasts.
“Not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”
Here Paul begins comparing the two covenants.
The Ten Commandments were written by God's finger on stone.
But the prophets promised a day when God would write His law on hearts.
Ezekiel promised that God would take away hearts of stone and give hearts of flesh.
That promise has come true in the new covenant.

Cross References

Exodus 31:18
When the LORD finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of the covenant law, tablets of stone written by the finger of God.
Jeremiah 31:33
“But this is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people.”
Ezekiel 11:19
I will give them one heart and put a new spirit in them. I will take away their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

Spiritual Principle

In the new covenant, the Spirit writes God's life on human hearts.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Every believer is a letter from Christ, written by the Spirit, for the world to read.

IV. CONFIDENCE THROUGH CHRIST

2 Corinthians 3:4 — Before God

“Such confidence we have through Christ before God.”
Paul speaks of his confidence.
“Such confidence.”
He was sure that his ministry was real.
He was sure the Corinthians were the work of God.
“Through Christ.”
His confidence did not come from himself.
It came through Christ.
“Before God.”
Paul was confident not just before people, but in God's presence.
This was not pride.
It was trust in what God had done.

Cross References

Ephesians 3:12
In Him and through faith in Him we can come to God with freedom and confidence.
Philippians 3:4
although I myself have reasons to put confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to trust in the flesh, I have even more.
Hebrews 10:19
So, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

Spiritual Principle

True confidence comes through Christ, not through ourselves.

V. OUR COMPETENCE COMES FROM GOD

2 Corinthians 3:5 — Not in Ourselves

“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”
Here is the answer to Paul's question from Chapter 2:
“Who is sufficient for these things?”
“Not that we are competent in ourselves.”
No human being is adequate for the work of God in his own strength.
“To claim anything for ourselves.”
Paul does not take credit for what God has done.
“But our competence comes from God.”
God makes His servants able.
He gives the strength, the wisdom, and the power.
This is both humbling and freeing.
Humbling, because we cannot do it alone.
Freeing, because we do not have to.

Cross References

John 15:5
> I am the vine; you are the branches. If you stay joined to Me and I to you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing.

Philippians 4:13
> I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.

Philippians 2:13
> For it is God who is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.

Spiritual Principle

God makes His servants able to do what He calls them to do.

Application

Is there a task God has given you that feels too big?
Your competence comes from God.

VI. MINISTERS OF A NEW COVENANT

2 Corinthians 3:6 — The Letter Kills, the Spirit Gives Life

“He has made us ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”
Paul describes his calling.
“He has made us ministers of a new covenant.”
A **covenant** is a binding relationship God makes with His people.
The prophet Jeremiah promised a new covenant.
In it, God would forgive sins and write His law on hearts.

Jesus established that new covenant through His blood.
“Not of the letter but of the Spirit.”
The **letter** refers to the law written on stone.
The law itself is good and holy.
But it could only tell people what to do.
It could not give them the power to do it.
“For the letter kills.”
The law showed people their sin and declared them guilty.
It brought condemnation and death.
“But the Spirit gives life.”
The Holy Spirit gives new life.
He changes hearts from the inside.
He gives the power to live for God.

Cross References

Jeremiah 31:31
> “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and the people of Judah.”

Hebrews 8:6
> But now Jesus has received a far greater ministry, just as the covenant He brings is better and is based on better promises.

John 6:63
> The Spirit gives life; the flesh accomplishes nothing. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.

Spiritual Principle

The law shows us our sin; the Spirit gives us new life.

Key Truth

The problem was never the law.
The problem was the human heart.
The new covenant changes the heart.

VII. THE GLORY ON MOSES' FACE

2 Corinthians 3:7 — The Ministry That Brought Death

“Now if the ministry that brought death, carved in letters on stone, came with glory—so much that the Israelites could not gaze at the face of Moses because of its fading glory—”
Paul now compares the two covenants.
“The ministry that brought death.”
The old covenant revealed sin and declared sinners guilty.
“Carved in letters on stone.”
The Ten Commandments.
“Came with glory.”
The giving of the law was glorious.
When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, his face shone with God's glory.

“So much that the Israelites could not gaze at the face of Moses.”
The people were afraid to look at him.
“Because of its fading glory.”
But that glory did not last.
It faded.
This was a picture of the old covenant itself.
It was glorious, but it was temporary.

Cross References

Exodus 34:29
> When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he did not know that the skin of his face was shining because he had been speaking with the LORD.

Exodus 34:30
> When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him.

Deuteronomy 5:22
> The LORD spoke these words with a loud voice to your whole assembly on the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the deep darkness. He added nothing more. Then He wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.

Spiritual Principle

The old covenant was truly glorious, but its glory was temporary.

VIII. EVEN MORE GLORIOUS

2 Corinthians 3:8 — The Ministry of the Spirit

“will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?”
Paul draws the conclusion.
If the old covenant came with glory—
“Will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?”
Of course it will.
The old covenant was written on stone.
The new is written on hearts.
The old brought death.
The new brings life.
The old was given through Moses.
The new is given through Christ and the Spirit.

Cross References

Romans 8:2
> For through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Galatians 3:5
> Does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law, or because you believe what you heard?

John 16:13
When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own. He will tell you what He hears, and He will show you what is still to come.

Spiritual Principle

The new covenant ministry of the Spirit surpasses the old in glory.

IX. CONDEMNATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

2 Corinthians 3:9 — How Much More Glorious

“For if the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!”
Paul gives a second comparison.
“The ministry that brought condemnation.”
The law declared, **“Guilty!”**
It showed that no one could keep it perfectly.
“Was glorious.”
Even so, it revealed God's holiness.
“How much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!”
The new covenant declares, **“Righteous!”**
Through faith in Christ, sinners are made right with God.
Which is more glorious?
A message that condemns, or a message that saves?

Cross References

Romans 8:1
So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.
Romans 3:22
This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between people.
Romans 5:17
Death ruled because of one man's sin. But how much more will those who receive God's overflowing grace and the gift of righteousness rule in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

Spiritual Principle

The law condemns, but the gospel brings righteousness through Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The law says, “Guilty”; the gospel says, “Forgiven.”

X. NO GLORY IN COMPARISON

2 Corinthians 3:10 — The Surpassing Glory

“For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.”
Paul makes a striking statement.
“What was glorious has no glory now.”
The old covenant was glorious.
But compared to the new, it seems to have no glory at all.
“In comparison with the surpassing glory.”
Think of the moon.
At night, it shines brightly.
But when the sun rises, the moon fades from view.
The moon has not changed.
But its light is overwhelmed by the far greater light of the sun.
So it is with the old and new covenants.

Cross References

Hebrews 8:6
> But now Jesus has received a far greater ministry, just as the covenant He brings is better and is based on better promises.

Hebrews 8:13
> By calling this covenant “new,” God has made the first one old. And what is old and aging will soon disappear.

Colossians 2:17
> These were only a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality is found in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The glory of Christ outshines everything that came before.

XI. WHAT LASTS

2 Corinthians 3:11 — How Much Greater

“And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!”
Paul gives a third comparison.
“What was fading away.”
The old covenant was temporary.
It was meant to prepare the way for Christ.
“Came with glory.”
Even so, it had glory.
“How much greater is the glory of that which lasts!”
The new covenant will never fade.
It is permanent.
It is eternal.

Cross References

Hebrews 8:13
By calling this covenant “new,” God has made the first one old. And what is old and aging will soon disappear.
Hebrews 12:27
The words “once more” show that the things that can be shaken—created things—will be removed, so that what cannot be shaken will remain.
1 Peter 1:25
but the word of the Lord lasts forever. And this word is the good news that was announced to you.

Spiritual Principle

The new covenant in Christ will last forever.

XII. WE ARE VERY BOLD

2 Corinthians 3:12 — Such a Hope

“Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.”
Paul draws a practical conclusion.
“Since we have such a hope.”
The hope of the new covenant—a glory that lasts forever.
“We are very bold.”
The word means speaking openly and freely, without fear.
Paul did not need to hide anything.
He could speak plainly about the gospel.
Confidence in the message gives courage to the messenger.

Cross References

Ephesians 3:12
In Him and through faith in Him we can come to God with freedom and confidence.
Acts 4:29
Now, Lord, look at their threats, and help Your servants speak Your word with great boldness.
Acts 4:31
After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Spiritual Principle

Hope in the new covenant gives boldness to speak openly.

Application

Are you speaking boldly about Christ?

XIII. MOSES' VEIL

2 Corinthians 3:13 — Not Like Moses

“We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at the end of what was fading away.”
Paul refers back to the story in Exodus.
After speaking with God, Moses' face shone.
When he spoke to the people, he covered his face with a veil.
When he went back to speak with God, he took the veil off.
Paul explains one reason for the veil.
“To keep the Israelites from gazing at the end of what was fading away.”
The glory on Moses' face was fading.
The veil kept the people from seeing it fade.
This was a picture of the old covenant itself.
Its glory was temporary.
Paul says, **“We are not like Moses.”**
Paul does not need to cover anything up.
The glory of the new covenant does not fade.

Cross References

Exodus 34:33
When Moses finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.
Exodus 34:34
But whenever he went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he removed the veil until he came out. When he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded,
Exodus 34:35
they saw that his face was shining. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in again to speak with the LORD.

Spiritual Principle

The glory of the new covenant does not fade and does not need to be hidden.

XIV. THEIR MINDS WERE HARDENED

2 Corinthians 3:14 — Only in Christ

“But their minds were hardened. To this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read; it has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.”
Paul now applies the picture of the veil in a new way.
“But their minds were hardened.”
Many in Israel did not understand what God was doing.
“To this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read.”
When the Old Testament was read without faith in Christ, its true meaning remained hidden.
It was as if a veil covered it.
“Because only in Christ is it taken away.”

The Old Testament points to Jesus.
Without Him, it cannot be fully understood.
Paul himself was Jewish.
He wrote this with deep love for his people.
And elsewhere he expressed great hope for them.
The same veil can cover anyone's heart, Jew or Gentile, until they turn to Christ.

Cross References

Exodus 34:33
When Moses finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.
Romans 11:25
I do not want you to be unaware of this secret truth, brothers and sisters, so that you will not think you are wiser than you are: part of Israel has been hardened until the full number of Gentiles has come in.
Isaiah 6:10
Make the hearts of these people dull. Make their ears deaf and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

Spiritual Principle

The Scriptures are fully understood only in the light of Christ.

Key Truth

Jesus is the key that unlocks the meaning of the whole Bible.

XV. A VEIL OVER THEIR HEARTS

2 Corinthians 3:15 — When Moses Is Read

“Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.”
Paul repeats the point.
“When Moses is read.”
The law of Moses was read every Sabbath in the synagogues.
“A veil covers their hearts.”
Notice the veil is now over the **heart**, not the face.
The problem was not the Scriptures.
The problem was the heart of the reader.
A heart that does not turn to Christ cannot see the full truth.

Cross References

Exodus 34:33
When Moses finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.
Acts 15:21
For Moses has been preached in every city since ancient times and is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.
Romans 10:3
Because they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and tried to set up their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual blindness is a matter of the heart, not the mind alone.

XVI. THE VEIL IS TAKEN AWAY

2 Corinthians 3:16 — Whenever Anyone Turns to the Lord

“But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”
Here is wonderful hope.
“But whenever anyone turns to the Lord.”
Anyone.
Jew or Gentile.
Religious or not.
The moment a person turns to the Lord—
“The veil is taken away.”
The blindness is removed.
The truth becomes clear.
Paul is echoing Moses.
When Moses turned to speak with the Lord, he took off his veil.
When anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed from their heart.
Paul himself experienced this.
When he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, something like scales fell from his eyes.

Cross References

Exodus 34:34
> But whenever he went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he removed the veil until he came out. When he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded,

Isaiah 25:7
> On this mountain He will remove the covering that hangs over all peoples, the veil that covers all nations.

Acts 9:18
> Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.

Spiritual Principle

Turning to the Lord removes the veil from the heart.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

No veil is too thick for Christ to remove.

Application

Pray for those you know who cannot yet see the truth.
The moment they turn to the Lord, the veil will be lifted.

XVII. WHERE THE SPIRIT IS, THERE IS LIBERTY

2 Corinthians 3:17 — The Lord Is the Spirit

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”
Paul explains who removes the veil.
“Now the Lord is the Spirit.”
The Lord we turn to is present by His Spirit.
The Spirit is the One who works in our hearts to remove the veil.
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work as one.
“And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”
Liberty means freedom.
Freedom from the veil.
Freedom from condemnation.
Freedom from trying to earn God's favor by keeping the law.
Freedom from the power of sin.
This is not freedom to do whatever we want.
It is freedom to know God and live for Him.

Cross References

John 8:36
So if the Son sets you free, you will be truly free.
Galatians 5:1
Christ has set us free so that we can live in freedom. So stand firm, and do not let yourselves be held again under slavery.
Galatians 5:13
Brothers and sisters, you were called to be free. But do not use your freedom as an excuse to please your sinful nature. Instead, serve one another in love.

Spiritual Principle

The Spirit brings true freedom to know and serve God.

Key Truth

True liberty is not freedom from God.
It is freedom for God.

XVIII. FROM GLORY TO GLORY

2 Corinthians 3:18 — Transformed into His Image

“And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”
This is one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible.

“And we all.”
Not just Moses.
Not just Paul.
All believers.
“With unveiled faces.”
Moses had to wear a veil.
But believers have nothing covering their faces.
We can look at God's glory openly.
“Beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror.”
We see the Lord's glory, especially as it is revealed in Jesus Christ.
We see Him in His word.
“Are being transformed into the same image.”
The word **transformed** is the same word used for Jesus' transfiguration.
As we look at Christ, we become like Him.
And notice: **“are being transformed.”**
It is a process.
It is happening now.
“From glory to glory.”
Step by step.
Day by day.
From one degree of glory to the next.
“Which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”
This change is God's work.
We behold.
He transforms.

Cross References

Romans 8:29
> For those God knew ahead of time, He also chose to become like His Son, so that His Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Romans 12:2
> Do not copy the ways of this world, but let God change you by giving you a new mind. Then you will be able to understand what God wants—what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

1 John 3:2
> Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been shown. But we know that when Christ appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He really is.

Spiritual Principle

As we behold Christ, the Spirit transforms us into His image.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

We become like what we behold—so behold Christ.

Application

How much time do you spend looking at Christ in His word?
What you behold is shaping who you are becoming.

XIX. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 3

1. Believers Are Living Letters

“You are a letter from Christ.”

Principle:

Our lives are testimonies written by the Spirit of God, more powerful than any written recommendation.

2. True Sufficiency Is from God

“Our competence comes from God.”

Principle:

Ministry is not about human strength but divine empowerment through the Spirit.

3. The New Covenant Surpasses the Old

“The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

Principle:

The law engraved on stone brought death and condemnation, but the Spirit brings righteousness and life.

4. Christ Removes the Veil

“Only in Christ is it taken away.”

Principle:

Without Him, spiritual blindness remains, but through Him, hearts are unveiled to see God's glory.

5. Freedom Is in the Spirit

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

Principle:

Life in Christ is not bondage to rules but liberty empowered by the Spirit.

6. Transformation Is Ongoing

“Being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.”

Principle:

As we behold Christ, the Spirit changes us from one degree of glory to another until we reflect His image.

XX. THE OLD COVENANT AND THE NEW COVENANT

Paul compares the two covenants throughout this chapter.

The Old Covenant

- Given through Moses.
- Written on tablets of stone.
- The letter.
- Brought death.
- Brought condemnation.
- Its glory faded.
- Was temporary.
- Its meaning is veiled without Christ.

The New Covenant

- Given through Christ.
- Written on human hearts.
- The Spirit.
- Gives life.
- Brings righteousness.
- Its glory surpasses the old.
- Lasts forever.
- Removes the veil and transforms us.

An Important Balance

Paul is not saying the law was bad.
The law was holy, good, and glorious.
It revealed God's holiness and showed people their need.
But it could not give life.
It pointed forward to Christ, who fulfills it.

Key Truth

The old covenant showed us our need; the new covenant meets it in Christ.

XXI. THE STORY OF MOSES' VEIL

Paul draws on Exodus 34.

Moses Spoke with God

On Mount Sinai, Moses spent time in God's presence.

His Face Shone

When he came down, his face reflected God's glory.

The People Were Afraid

They could not look at him.

Moses Wore a Veil

He covered his face when speaking to the people.

Moses Removed the Veil Before the Lord

When he went to speak with God, he took the veil off.

Paul's Application

- The fading glory pictures the temporary old covenant.
- The veil pictures hearts that do not yet see Christ.
- Turning to the Lord removes the veil, as Moses did.
- Believers now see God's glory with unveiled faces.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Moses reflected God's glory for a moment; believers are being transformed by it forever.

XXII. HOW TRANSFORMATION HAPPENS

Verse 18 shows how believers become like Christ.

We Turn to the Lord

The veil is removed.

We Behold His Glory

We look at Christ, especially in His word.

The Spirit Transforms Us

The change is His work, not ours.

We Are Changed Gradually

“From glory to glory.”

We Become Like Christ

“Into the same image.”

One Day the Change Will Be Complete

“When Christ appears, we will be like Him.”

Key Truth

We behold, and He transforms.

XXIII. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 3 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS AND THE SPIRIT

Christ Writes on Hearts

“You are a letter from Christ.”

Our Confidence Is Through Christ

“Such confidence we have through Christ.”

The Veil Is Removed in Christ

“Only in Christ is it taken away.”

The Spirit Gives Life

“The Spirit gives life.”

The Spirit Brings Liberty

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

The Spirit Transforms Us into Christ's Image

“Which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ opens our eyes, and the Spirit makes us like Him.

XXIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why didn't Paul need letters of recommendation?
The Corinthians themselves were his letter.
Their changed lives proved his ministry was real.

Question 2

What does it mean that believers are a “letter from Christ”?
Christ wrote on their hearts by the Spirit.

Their lives show the world what Christ has done.

Question 3

Where does our competence for ministry come from?
From God.
No one is adequate in his own strength.

Question 4

What does “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” mean?
The law shows us our sin and condemns us.
But the Spirit gives new life and changes our hearts.

Question 5

Was the law bad?
No.
The law was holy and glorious.
But it could not give life, and it pointed forward to Christ.

Question 6

Why did Moses' face shine?
He had been in the presence of God.
His face reflected God's glory.

Question 7

Why did Moses wear a veil?
Paul says it kept the people from seeing the glory fade.
It pictured the temporary nature of the old covenant.

Question 8

What is the veil over people's hearts today?
It is spiritual blindness that keeps people from understanding the truth about Christ.
It can cover any heart until that person turns to the Lord.

Question 9

How is the veil removed?
Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Question 10

What kind of liberty does the Spirit give?
Freedom from condemnation, from the power of sin, and from trying to earn God's favor.
It is freedom to know God and live for Him.

Question 11

How are believers transformed into Christ's image?
By beholding His glory.
The Spirit changes them step by step, from glory to glory.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 3 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 3 should cause believers to live:

- As living letters that show Christ to the world.
- Depending on God's strength, not their own.
- Rejoicing in the new covenant.
- Free from condemnation.
- Reading the whole Bible in the light of Christ.
- Praying for those whose hearts are veiled.
- Speaking boldly about the gospel.
- Spending time beholding Christ.

XXV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 3 asks several important questions.

What Does My Life Say About Christ?

If people read my life, what would they learn?

Am I Relying on My Own Strength?

Or do I trust that my competence comes from God?

Am I Living Under the Letter or the Spirit?

Am I trying to earn God's favor, or living by His grace?

Do I Read the Bible in the Light of Christ?

Do I see Jesus throughout Scripture?

Who Do I Know Whose Heart Is Veiled?

Am I praying for them to turn to the Lord?

Am I Walking in the Spirit's Freedom?

Or am I still living in bondage?

How Much Time Do I Spend Beholding Christ?

What am I looking at most?

Am I Being Transformed?

Am I more like Christ than I was a year ago?

XXVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“We Become What We Behold”

Moses spent time with God, and his face shone.
He did not try to make it shine.
It shone because he had been with God.
The same is true for believers today.
We cannot make ourselves holy by trying harder.
We cannot change our hearts by our own effort.
But as we look at Christ—
In His word.
In prayer.
In worship.
The Spirit changes us.
Slowly.
Steadily.
From glory to glory.
We become like what we look at most.
If we fill our eyes with the world, we become like the world.
If we fill our eyes with Christ, we become like Christ.
This creates a powerful principle.
Transformation is not mainly about trying.
It is about beholding.

Principle:

Look at Jesus, and the Spirit will make you like Him.

XXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 3 was written to a church being impressed by the wrong things.
False teachers came with letters of recommendation.
They boasted in their credentials.
Some may have urged a return to the old covenant.
Paul pointed them to something far greater.
The Corinthians themselves were Paul's letter, written by the Spirit.
The new covenant was more glorious than the old.
The veil was removed in Christ.
And believers were being transformed into His image.
2 Corinthians 3 therefore reminds us:
Never trust in human credentials.

Never rely on your own strength.
Never go back to living by the letter.
Never stop praying for those whose hearts are veiled.
Never stop beholding Christ.
The church does not need more impressive letters.
It needs:
Lives written by the Spirit.
Servants made able by God.
Hearts unveiled by Christ.
And believers being transformed from glory to glory.
The same Spirit still works:
Tell people that the Spirit gives life.
Tell people that there is no condemnation in Christ.
Tell people that the veil can be removed.
Tell people that God can transform them.
And every day:
Turn to the Lord.
Behold His glory.
Walk in His freedom.
Be transformed into His image.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for the new covenant in Jesus Christ.
Thank You that You have written Your life on our hearts by Your Spirit.
Thank You that our competence comes from You.
Thank You that the Spirit gives life.
Thank You that in Christ there is no condemnation.
Thank You that whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
Thank You that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.
Thank You that we are being transformed into the image of Christ, from glory to glory.
Forgive us when we have trusted in our own strength.
Forgive us when we have lived under the letter instead of by the Spirit.
Forgive us when we have filled our eyes with the world instead of with Christ.
Make our lives letters that clearly show Christ to everyone who reads them.
Give us boldness to speak the gospel openly.
Remove the veil from the hearts of those we love who do not yet know You.
Help us read Your word and see Jesus on every page.
Keep our eyes fixed on Christ.
And by Your Spirit, make us more and more like Him every day.
“And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” — 2 Corinthians 3:18

Central Truth

The new covenant of the Spirit is far more glorious than the old covenant of the letter, because it writes God's life on human hearts, removes the veil in Christ, and transforms believers into the image of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3 in One Sentence

Paul declares that the Corinthians are his living letter written by the Spirit, that his competence comes from God as a minister of the new covenant whose life-giving glory surpasses the fading glory of the old, and that whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is removed and believers are transformed into Christ's image from glory to glory.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 4 — Treasure in Earthen Vessels

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 4 is one of the most encouraging chapters in the Bible for believers who are weary, weak, or suffering.
In Chapter 3, Paul described the glory of the new covenant.

Believers are being transformed into Christ's image, from glory to glory.
But someone might ask:
If the gospel is so glorious, why are its messengers so weak?
Paul was not impressive to look at.
He was often sick, beaten, poor, and misunderstood.
His critics in Corinth pointed to his weakness as proof he was not a true apostle.
Paul answers with one of the most beautiful pictures in Scripture.
“We have this treasure in jars of clay.”
The gospel is a priceless treasure.
But God has placed it in ordinary, fragile, breakable people.
Why?
“To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”
Paul also explains why some people do not believe.
It is not because the gospel is unclear.
It is because the god of this world has blinded their minds.
But the same God who said, **“Let there be light,”** shines into human hearts to show them the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
Then Paul describes his suffering honestly.
Pressed but not crushed.
Perplexed but not in despair.
Persecuted but not abandoned.
Struck down but not destroyed.
And he ends with a glorious perspective.
Outwardly, we are wasting away.
Inwardly, we are being renewed day by day.
Our troubles are light and momentary.
The glory ahead is eternal and beyond comparison.
So we fix our eyes on what is unseen.
The chapter moves through five movements:

- The Integrity of the Gospel (verses 1–4).
- Christ, Not Ourselves (verses 5–6).
- Treasure in Clay Jars (verses 7–12).
- Faith in the God Who Raises the Dead (verses 13–15).
- Eternal Glory Outweighs Present Suffering (verses 16–18).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 4 is:
God places the treasure of the gospel in weak human vessels so that His power is seen, and though believers suffer outwardly, they are renewed inwardly and look to an eternal glory that far outweighs their present troubles.

I. WE DO NOT LOSE HEART

2 Corinthians 4:1 — Through God's Mercy

“Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.”
Paul begins with a strong statement.
“Through God's mercy we have this ministry.”
Paul never forgot that his ministry was a gift of mercy.
He had been a persecutor of the church.

He did not deserve to be an apostle.
But God showed him mercy.
“We do not lose heart.”
Paul faced constant opposition, suffering, and criticism.
He could have given up.
But he did not.
Why?
Because a ministry received by mercy is sustained by mercy.
Paul will repeat this phrase at the end of the chapter.
It frames everything he says.

Cross References

1 Timothy 1:13
> even though I once spoke against God, persecuted His people, and treated them with violence. But God showed me mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

Galatians 6:9
> So let us not grow tired of doing good, because at the right time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

2 Corinthians 4:16
> So we do not give up. Even though our outer self is wearing out, our inner self is being made new day by day.

Spiritual Principle

Remembering God's mercy keeps us from losing heart.

Application

When you feel like giving up, remember that your calling came from God's mercy.

II. RENOUNCING HIDDEN THINGS

2 Corinthians 4:2 — Openly Declaring the Truth

“But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in deceit, nor distorting the word of God. Instead, by openly declaring the truth, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.”
Paul describes how he ministered.
“We have renounced the hidden things of shame.”
He refused to use secret methods he would be ashamed of.
“Not walking in deceit.”
He did not use tricks or manipulation.
“Nor distorting the word of God.”
He did not twist Scripture or water it down.
“Instead, by openly declaring the truth.”
Paul simply told the truth plainly.
“We commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.”
He did not need letters of recommendation.
His honesty spoke to people's consciences.

And he lived knowing God was watching.

Cross References

Romans 6:21
What benefit did you get from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things lead to death.
1 Thessalonians 2:3
For the appeal we make does not come from error, impure motives, or trickery.
Ephesians 4:25
So stop telling lies. Each of you must speak the truth to your neighbor, because we are all parts of the same body.

Spiritual Principle

God's truth must be shared openly and honestly, without tricks or distortion.

Key Truth

The gospel needs no gimmicks.
It needs faithful, honest messengers.

III. IF OUR GOSPEL IS VEILED

2 Corinthians 4:3 — To Those Who Are Perishing

“But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,”
Paul anticipates an objection.
If the gospel is so clear, why do so many people reject it?
“If our gospel is veiled.”
Paul uses the picture of the veil from Chapter 3.
“It is veiled to those who are perishing.”
The problem is not the message.
The message is clear.
The problem is with the hearers who are on the road to destruction.
Their hearts are covered.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:18
The message of the cross seems foolish to those who are being lost, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
2 Corinthians 2:15
To God, we are the sweet smell of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.
John 3:19
This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light, because what they did was evil.

Spiritual Principle

When people reject the gospel, the problem is not with the message but with the heart.

IV. THE GOD OF THIS WORLD

2 Corinthians 4:4 — Blinded Minds

“in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”
Paul explains why some cannot see.
“The god of this world.”
This is Satan.
He is not truly a god.
But many people in this world follow him and live under his influence.
Jesus called him **“the ruler of this world.”**
“Has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.”
Satan works to keep people from seeing the truth.
He blinds minds through pride, distraction, false beliefs, and love of sin.
“So that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”
The gospel shines like light.
But blind eyes cannot see it.
“Who is the image of God.”
Jesus perfectly shows us who God is.
To see Christ is to see God.
That is exactly what Satan does not want people to see.

Cross References

John 12:31
Now is the time for this world to be judged. Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out.
Ephesians 2:2
You used to live that way, following the ways of this world and the ruler of the power of the air—the spirit who is now at work in those who disobey God.
Colossians 1:15
Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn over all creation.

Spiritual Principle

Behind unbelief is a spiritual battle; Satan works to blind people to the glory of Christ.

Application

When you share the gospel, remember there is a spiritual battle.
Pray for God to open blind eyes.

V. WE PREACH CHRIST JESUS AS LORD

2 Corinthians 4:5 — Not Ourselves

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.”
Paul states the heart of his message.

“We do not preach ourselves.”
Paul was not trying to build his own reputation.
His critics were promoting themselves.
Paul refused to do that.
“But Christ Jesus as Lord.”
The message is about Jesus.
And Jesus is Lord.
“And ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.”
Paul saw himself as a servant.
The word means **slave.**
He served the Corinthians because he loved Jesus.
This is the right order:
Christ is Lord.
We are servants.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:23
But we preach Christ crucified. This message offends the Jews and sounds foolish to the Gentiles.
1 Corinthians 9:19
Though I am free from everyone, I have made myself a servant to all, so that I may win as many as possible.
Romans 1:1
Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called by God to be an apostle and set apart to share God's good news.

Spiritual Principle

True ministry points to Christ as Lord, not to the minister.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ is the message; we are only the messengers and servants.

VI. LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS

2 Corinthians 4:6 — In the Face of Jesus Christ

“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”
Paul explains how blind eyes are opened.
“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness.’”
Paul points back to creation.
In the beginning, the world was dark.
God spoke, and light appeared.
“Has shone in our hearts.”
The same God who created light in the world creates light in the heart.
Salvation is a new creation.
Just as God spoke light into the darkness at creation, He shines into dark hearts and gives sight.
“To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Where do we see God's glory?
In the face of Jesus.
Moses saw God's glory reflected and had to veil his face.
Believers see God's glory shining in Jesus Christ.
Paul himself experienced this on the road to Damascus, when a light from heaven shone around him.

Cross References

Genesis 1:3
Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
John 1:9
The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
Isaiah 9:2
The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has shined.

Spiritual Principle

Salvation is God's creative work, shining light into dark hearts.

Key Truth

The same voice that created the stars can create light in the darkest heart.

VII. TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY

2 Corinthians 4:7 — The Surpassing Power Belongs to God

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”
This is the heart of the chapter.
“We have this treasure.”
The treasure is the gospel—the light of the knowledge of God's glory in Christ.
Nothing is more valuable.
“In jars of clay.”
In Paul's world, clay jars were cheap, ordinary, and easily broken.
People sometimes hid valuables in them.
Small clay lamps were also used to carry light.
Paul says believers are like those clay jars.
Weak.
Ordinary.
Fragile.
“To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”
This is why God puts His treasure in weak vessels.
So that no one will think the power comes from the jar.
When God works through weak people, everyone can see that the power is His.

Cross References

Jeremiah 18:6
> “People of Israel, can't I do with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, people of Israel.”

2 Corinthians 12:9
> But He told me, “My grace is all you need, because My power works best in weakness.” So I will gladly brag even more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power can rest on me.

1 Corinthians 1:27
> But God chose the things the world thinks are foolish to shame the wise. God chose the things the world thinks are weak to shame the strong.

Spiritual Principle

God puts His treasure in weak vessels so that His power is clearly seen.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Your weakness is not a barrier to God's work; it is the stage on which His power is displayed.

Application

Do you feel too ordinary or weak for God to use?
That is exactly the kind of jar God chooses.

VIII. PRESSED BUT NOT CRUSHED

2 Corinthians 4:8 — Perplexed but Not in Despair

“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;”
Paul now describes life as a clay jar.
He gives four contrasts.
The first two are in this verse.
“Hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed.”
Pressure came from every direction.
But Paul was not crushed.
He was squeezed, but not destroyed.
“Perplexed, but not in despair.”
Paul did not always understand what was happening.
He was confused at times.
But he never lost hope.
Notice that Paul is honest.
He does not pretend life was easy.
But he shows that God's power kept him from being destroyed.

Cross References

Psalm 42:5
> Why are you so downcast, my soul? Why are you so troubled within me? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise Him, my Savior and my God.

2 Corinthians 6:9
> known, yet treated as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed;

2 Corinthians 11:23
Are they servants of Christ? I am speaking like a madman, but I am more so. I have worked much harder, been in prison more often, been beaten more severely, and faced death again and again.

Spiritual Principle

God allows pressure, but He does not allow His people to be crushed.

IX. PERSECUTED BUT NOT ABANDONED

2 Corinthians 4:9 — Struck Down but Not Destroyed

“persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”
Paul gives the last two contrasts.
“Persecuted, but not abandoned.”
People hunted Paul.
But God never left him.
“Struck down, but not destroyed.”
Paul was knocked down many times.
Beaten.
Stoned.
Left for dead.
But he got back up.
The clay jar was cracked and battered.
But the treasure inside was never lost.

Cross References

Psalm 37:24
Though he stumbles, he will not fall flat, because the LORD holds him by the hand.
Psalm 34:19
The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD rescues him from them all.
Hebrews 13:5
Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “I will never leave you; I will never abandon you.”

Spiritual Principle

Believers may be knocked down, but God never abandons them.

Key Truth

Down is not out when God is holding you.

X. CARRYING THE DEATH OF JESUS

2 Corinthians 4:10 — That His Life May Be Revealed

“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

Paul explains the meaning of his suffering.
“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus.”
Paul's sufferings were a daily sharing in the sufferings of Jesus.
His scars, weakness, and hardships reflected the cross.
“So that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”
But in that weakness, the resurrection life of Jesus could be seen.
When a weak, suffering servant keeps going with joy, people see that something more than human strength is at work.
They see the life of Jesus.

Cross References

Galatians 2:20
> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 6:17
> From now on, let no one cause me trouble, because I carry the marks of Jesus on my body.

Romans 8:17
> And if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—if we share in His sufferings so that we may also share in His glory.

Spiritual Principle

The life of Jesus is revealed most clearly through those who share His sufferings.

XI. GIVEN OVER TO DEATH

2 Corinthians 4:11 — For Jesus' Sake

“For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh.”
Paul repeats the thought.
“We who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake.”
Paul faced death constantly.
He was always in danger because he followed Jesus.
“So that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh.”
In his dying body, Christ's life was on display.
This is a pattern for every believer.
We die to ourselves.
And Christ's life shines through.

Cross References

Romans 8:36
> As Scripture says: “For Your sake we face death all day long. We are treated like sheep led to be slaughtered.”

Philippians 1:20
> I eagerly expect and hope that I will not be ashamed in any way, but that I will have full courage, so that now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

John 12:25
Whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Spiritual Principle

Dying to self allows the life of Christ to be seen in us.

XII. DEATH IN US, LIFE IN YOU

2 Corinthians 4:12 — The Fruit of Suffering

“So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”
Paul sums up the meaning of his suffering.
“Death is at work in us.”
Paul was suffering and wearing out.
“But life is at work in you.”
Because Paul was willing to suffer, the Corinthians received eternal life.
His sacrifice brought them blessing.
This is the pattern of the cross.
Jesus died so that we might live.
And His servants pour out their lives so that others may receive life.

Cross References

John 12:24
I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it stays only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.
1 Corinthians 4:10
We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, but we are dishonored!
Colossians 1:24
Now I rejoice in what I suffer for you. In my body I am doing my part to share in Christ's sufferings for the sake of His body, the church.

Spiritual Principle

The sacrifice of God's servants brings life to others.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Like seeds that fall into the ground, lives poured out for Christ produce a harvest.

XIII. I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE

2 Corinthians 4:13 — The Spirit of Faith

“It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak,”
Paul quotes Psalm 116.

“I believed; therefore I have spoken.”
In that psalm, the writer was in great trouble.
But he kept trusting God and kept speaking of Him.
“Since we have that same spirit of faith.”
Paul had the same faith.
“We also believe and therefore speak.”
Real faith cannot stay silent.
Even in suffering, Paul kept preaching.
His speaking flowed from his believing.

Cross References

Psalm 116:10
I believed, even when I said, “I am deeply troubled.”
Romans 10:10
For it is with your heart that you believe and are made right with God, and it is with your mouth that you declare your faith and are saved.
Matthew 12:34
You brood of snakes! How can you say anything good when you are evil? For the mouth speaks what fills the heart.

Spiritual Principle

True faith leads us to speak about God, even in hard times.

Application

Does your faith lead you to speak?

XIV. HE WILL ALSO RAISE US

2 Corinthians 4:14 — Presented with You

“knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to Himself.”
Why could Paul keep speaking in the face of death?
“Knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus.”
Death was not the end.
The God who raised Jesus would raise Paul too.
“And present us with you to Himself.”
One day, Paul and the Corinthians would stand together in God's presence.
This hope gave Paul courage.
He could face death because he knew the resurrection was coming.

Cross References

Romans 8:11
If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then the One who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.
1 Corinthians 6:14
God raised the Lord, and He will also raise us by His power.

1 Thessalonians 4:14
For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we also believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.

Spiritual Principle

The hope of resurrection gives courage to face suffering and death.

XV. FOR YOUR BENEFIT

2 Corinthians 4:15 — Thanksgiving to the Glory of God

“All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.”
Paul explains the purpose of everything he endured.
“All this is for your benefit.”
Paul's suffering was for their good.
“So that the grace that is reaching more and more people.”
As the gospel spread, more people experienced God's grace.
“May cause thanksgiving to overflow.”
More grace leads to more thanksgiving.
“To the glory of God.”
And more thanksgiving brings more glory to God.
This is the ultimate goal of all ministry.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 1:6
If we are troubled, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which helps you patiently endure the same sufferings we suffer.
Romans 5:15
But the gift is not like the sin. Many died because of one man's sin, but God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflowed to many more.
2 Corinthians 9:12
This service you are giving not only meets the needs of God's people, but also overflows in many thanks to God.

Spiritual Principle

The spread of grace leads to overflowing thanksgiving and God's glory.

XVI. RENEWED DAY BY DAY

2 Corinthians 4:16 — Wasting Away, Yet Renewed

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”
Paul repeats what he said in verse 1.
“Therefore we do not lose heart.”

Now he explains why.
“Though outwardly we are wasting away.”
Paul's body was aging.
It was worn out by suffering.
It was getting weaker.
This is true for everyone.
Our bodies are slowly wearing out.
“Yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”
But something else is happening inside.
The inner person—the spirit—is being made new.
Every day.
Strength for today.
Hope for tomorrow.
Growth in Christ.
The outside is fading, but the inside is getting stronger.

Cross References

Ephesians 3:16
I pray that from His glorious riches He will strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being,
Isaiah 40:31
But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not grow faint.
Colossians 3:10
and have put on the new self, which is being made new in knowledge to be like its Creator.

Spiritual Principle

Even as our bodies weaken, God renews our inner life every day.

Application

If you are growing older or weaker, take heart.
God is renewing you inwardly every day.

XVII. AN ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY

2 Corinthians 4:17 — Light and Momentary Troubles

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”
This is one of the most amazing statements in the Bible.
“Our light and momentary troubles.”
Think of what Paul had suffered.
Beatings.
Prison.
Shipwrecks.
Hunger.
Danger.

Yet he calls them **light** and **momentary.**
Not because they did not hurt.
But because of what he compared them to.
“Are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory.”
Light versus **weight.**
Momentary versus **eternal.**
In the Hebrew language, the word for **glory** also carries the idea of **weight.**
Our troubles are like a feather.
The coming glory is like a mountain.
“Far beyond all comparison.”
There is no comparison at all.
And notice that troubles are **achieving** glory.
God uses our suffering to prepare something wonderful for us.

Cross References

Romans 8:18
> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

1 Peter 1:7
> These trials prove that your faith is real. Your faith is worth far more than gold, which perishes even though fire tests it. Real faith will bring praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Romans 5:3
> Not only that, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces endurance,

Spiritual Principle

Present suffering is light and brief compared to the eternal glory ahead.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Put your troubles on the scale beside eternity, and they become light.

XVIII. WHAT IS UNSEEN IS ETERNAL

2 Corinthians 4:18 — Fixing Our Eyes

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”
Paul ends with the secret of not losing heart.
“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen.”
What is seen?
Our problems.
Our pain.
Our weakness.
The world around us.
“But on what is unseen.”
What is unseen?
God.

Christ at the right hand of the Father.
Heaven.
The coming glory.
“For what is seen is temporary.”
Everything we can see will pass away.
“But what is unseen is eternal.”
The things of God will last forever.
Where we fix our eyes determines whether we lose heart or keep going.

Cross References

Hebrews 11:1
Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.
Hebrews 12:2
Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, ignoring its shame, and now He is seated at the right hand of God's throne.
Colossians 3:2
Set your minds on the things above, not on earthly things.

Spiritual Principle

Fixing our eyes on eternal things keeps us from losing heart.

Key Truth

What you look at determines how you live.
Look at what lasts.

XIX. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 4

1. The Gospel Is Clear, but Unbelief Blinds

“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.”

Principle:

Satan blinds unbelievers to the light of Christ, yet God shines His light in willing hearts.

2. We Carry Treasure in Weak Vessels

“We have this treasure in jars of clay.”

Principle:

God works through our frailty so that His power, not our strength, is glorified.

3. Suffering Is Not the End

“Struck down, but not destroyed.”

Principle:

Affliction presses us but cannot destroy us, for Christ's life is revealed even in our weakness.

4. Faith Fuels Endurance

“He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us.”

Principle:

Because Christ rose, we believe He will raise us also and present us in glory.

5. Eternal Glory Outweighs Present Pain

“Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory.”

Principle:

Trials are temporary; the unseen, eternal realities are far greater than the visible struggles of this life.

XX. FOUR CONTRASTS IN SUFFERING

Verses 8–9 give four pictures of the believer's life.

Hard Pressed, but Not Crushed

Pressure comes from every side, but God keeps us from being crushed.

Perplexed, but Not in Despair

We do not always understand, but we never lose hope.

Persecuted, but Not Abandoned

People may turn against us, but God never leaves us.

Struck Down, but Not Destroyed

We may be knocked down, but we are never knocked out.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The clay jar may crack, but the treasure inside is never lost.

XXI. WHY GOD USES CLAY JARS

Verse 7 explains why God puts His treasure in weak people.

So That His Power Is Seen

“To show that the surpassing power belongs to God.”

So That No One Boasts in the Jar

“And not to us.”

So That Weak People Have Hope

If God can use Paul, He can use anyone.

So That Christ's Life Shines Through

“So that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

So That Others Receive Life

“Death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”

Key Truth

God does not choose strong vessels to show His strength; He chooses weak ones to show His power.

XXII. THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

Verses 16–18 contrast two ways of seeing life.

What Is Seen

- The outer self wasting away.
- Troubles that feel heavy.
- Suffering that feels long.
- Things that are temporary.

What Is Unseen

- The inner self being renewed day by day.
- A glory that is weighty.
- A glory that is eternal.
- Things that last forever.

Key Truth

Faith sees beyond the temporary to the eternal.

XXIII. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 4 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

He Is the Image of God

“Christ, who is the image of God.”

He Is Lord

“We preach... Christ Jesus as Lord.”

God's Glory Shines in His Face

“The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

His Death and Life Are Seen in Us

“The death of Jesus... the life of Jesus.”

He Was Raised, and We Will Be Raised

“He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

To see Jesus is to see the glory of God, and to follow Him is to share both His death and His life.

XXIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did Paul not lose heart?
He remembered that his ministry came from God's mercy.
He was being renewed inwardly every day.
He kept his eyes on eternal things.

Question 2

How did Paul share the gospel?
Openly and honestly, without tricks, deceit, or distorting God's word.

Question 3

Why do some people not believe the gospel?
The god of this world has blinded their minds.
The problem is not the message, but spiritual blindness.

Question 4

Who is “the god of this world”?
Satan, who influences those who do not follow God.

Question 5

How does God open blind eyes?
The same God who said “Let there be light” at creation shines into human hearts.

He shows them His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Question 6

What is the “treasure in jars of clay”?
The treasure is the gospel of Christ.
The jars of clay are weak, ordinary believers.

Question 7

Why does God put His treasure in weak vessels?
So that everyone can see that the power belongs to God and not to us.

Question 8

What are the four contrasts in verses 8–9?
Hard pressed but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed.

Question 9

What does it mean to carry the death of Jesus in our bodies?
Believers share in Christ's sufferings.
And in their weakness, the life of Jesus is revealed.

Question 10

Why could Paul call his troubles “light and momentary”?
Because he compared them to the eternal weight of glory to come.

Question 11

What does it mean to fix our eyes on what is unseen?
To focus on God, Christ, and the eternal glory ahead, rather than only on present problems.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 4 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 4 should cause believers to live:

- Not losing heart.
- Sharing the gospel honestly.
- Praying for blind eyes to be opened.
- Pointing to Christ, not themselves.
- Accepting their weakness as a place for God's power.
- Enduring hardship with hope.
- Being renewed inwardly every day.
- Fixing their eyes on eternal things.

XXV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 4 asks several important questions.

Am I Losing Heart?

What do I need to remember about God's mercy?

Am I Honest in How I Share God's Word?

Do I ever water it down or twist it?

Am I Praying for Those Who Are Spiritually Blind?

Who needs God's light to shine in their heart?

Am I Pointing to Myself or to Christ?

Who gets the attention when I serve?

How Do I See My Weakness?

As a problem, or as a place for God's power?

How Am I Handling Pressure?

Am I trusting God to keep me from being crushed?

Is My Inner Life Being Renewed?

Am I spending time with God every day?

Where Are My Eyes Fixed?

On what is seen, or on what is unseen?

XXVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Cracked Jars Let the Light Shine Through”

A clay lamp carries light.
The lamp itself is plain and ordinary.
But the light inside is what matters.
And sometimes, when a clay jar is cracked, the light inside shines out through the cracks.
That is a picture of the Christian life.
God has placed the light of Christ inside ordinary people.
We are cracked by suffering.
We are chipped by trials.
We are weakened by age and hardship.
But through every crack, the light of Jesus shines out.
People do not see how strong we are.
They see how strong He is.

This creates a powerful principle.
Do not be ashamed of your weakness.
It is where God's power is seen most clearly.

Principle:

The cracks in the jar are where the light shines through.

XXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 4 was written by a man who was hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down.
His critics said his weakness proved he was not a true apostle.
Paul said his weakness proved that God's power was at work.
He did not lose heart.
He did not preach himself.
He did not twist God's word.
He fixed his eyes on what is eternal.
2 Corinthians 4 therefore reminds us:
Never lose heart.
Never be ashamed of your weakness.
Never point to yourself instead of Christ.
Never forget that you are being renewed inside.
Never let present troubles hide eternal glory.
The church does not need perfect vessels.
It needs:
Ordinary people carrying an extraordinary treasure.
Servants who point to Christ as Lord.
Believers who endure with hope.
And eyes fixed on what is eternal.
The same light still shines:
Tell people that God can shine light into the darkest heart.
Tell people that Jesus shows us the glory of God.
Tell people that weakness is not the end.
Tell people that eternal glory is coming.
And in every trial:
Do not lose heart.
Let the light shine through.
Be renewed day by day.
Fix your eyes on what is unseen.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for the mercy that has given us a place in Your work.
Thank You for the treasure of the gospel.
Thank You that You shined Your light into our hearts to give us the knowledge of Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Thank You that You place this treasure in ordinary jars of clay, so that everyone can see that the power belongs to You.
Thank You that we may be hard pressed, but not crushed.
Thank You that we may be perplexed, but not in despair.
Thank You that we may be persecuted, but never abandoned.
Thank You that we may be struck down, but not destroyed.
Thank You that You who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us.
Thank You that even as our outer selves waste away, You renew our inner selves day by day.
Forgive us when we have lost heart.
Forgive us when we have pointed to ourselves instead of to Christ.
Forgive us when we have fixed our eyes on our troubles instead of on You.
Open the blind eyes of those who cannot yet see the light of the gospel.
Help us share Your word honestly and boldly.
Let the life of Jesus be seen in our weakness.
Renew us inwardly each day.
And keep our eyes fixed on what is unseen and eternal.
“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” — 2 Corinthians 4:7

Central Truth

God places the treasure of the gospel in weak human vessels so that His power is seen, and though believers suffer outwardly, they are renewed inwardly and look to an eternal glory that far outweighs their present troubles.

2 Corinthians 4 in One Sentence

Paul explains that he does not lose heart because his ministry comes from God's mercy, that unbelievers are blinded by Satan while God shines His light in hearts through Christ, that the treasure of the gospel is carried in weak clay jars to show God's power, and that present troubles are light and momentary compared to the eternal glory ahead.

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 5 — The Ministry of Reconciliation

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 5 is one of the great gospel chapters of the Bible.
It continues the thought of Chapter 4.
Paul had just said that our outer self is wasting away, but our inner self is being renewed day by day.
He said we fix our eyes on what is unseen and eternal.
Now he explains what that eternal hope looks like.
Our bodies are like tents.
They are temporary.
One day they will be taken down.
But God has prepared a permanent home for us.
A building not made with hands.
Eternal in the heavens.
Because of this hope, believers can be confident even when facing death.
To be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord.
But Paul also reminds us that every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
That truth shapes how we live.
Then Paul explains what drives his ministry.
“The love of Christ compels us.”
Christ died for all.
So those who live should live for Him.
And anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.
Finally, Paul gives one of the clearest descriptions of the gospel in all of Scripture.
God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.
He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.
And He has made believers His ambassadors, carrying the message:
“Be reconciled to God.”
The chapter moves through five movements:

- Our Heavenly Dwelling (verses 1–5).
- Walking by Faith, Not Sight (verses 6–10).
- Compelled by Christ's Love (verses 11–15).
- New Creation in Christ (verses 16–17).
- The Ministry of Reconciliation (verses 18–21).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 5 is:

Because Christ died and rose for us, believers have an eternal home, live by faith to please Him, become new creations, and carry God's message of reconciliation to the world.

I. OUR EARTHLY TENT

2 Corinthians 5:1 — A Building from God

“For we know that if our earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”
Paul begins with certainty.
“For we know.”
This is not a guess or a wish.
It is a settled confidence.
“If our earthly tent we live in is destroyed.”
Paul was a tentmaker.
He knew tents well.
Tents are temporary.
They wear out.
They are taken down and moved.
Our bodies are like tents.
They are not meant to last forever in their present form.
“We have a building from God.”
In contrast to a tent, a building is solid and permanent.
“A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”
God Himself has prepared it.
It will last forever.
This points to the glorious resurrection body and our eternal home with God.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 15:53
> For this perishable body must put on what is imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

Philippians 1:23
> I am torn between the two. I long to leave this life and be with Christ, which is far better.

John 14:2
> My Father's house has many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

Spiritual Principle

Our bodies are temporary tents, but God has prepared an eternal home for His people.

Key Truth

Death for the believer is moving out of a tent and into a permanent home.

II. WE GROAN

2 Corinthians 5:2 — Longing for Our Heavenly Dwelling

“For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling,”
Paul is honest about life in this body.
“For in this tent we groan.”
We feel pain.
We grow tired.
We get sick.
We grow old.
Life in a fallen world brings groaning.
“Longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.”
Paul mixes two pictures.
A house and clothing.
We long to put on our new, glorious bodies like putting on new clothes.
This longing is not wrong.
It is a sign that we were made for something more.

Cross References

Romans 8:23
> And not only creation, but we ourselves, who have the Spirit as the first part of God's harvest, groan inwardly as we eagerly wait for our full adoption as God's children, the redemption of our bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:54
> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

Philippians 3:21
> By the power that lets Him bring everything under His control, He will change our weak earthly bodies to be like His glorious body.

Spiritual Principle

The groaning of this life points us to the glory of the next.

III. NOT FOUND NAKED

2 Corinthians 5:3 — Clothed

“if indeed, when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.”
Paul continues the picture of clothing.
The Greeks often spoke of death as the soul escaping the body and floating free.
Many saw that as the goal.
But Paul did not long to be a bodiless spirit.
He longed to be **clothed**—with a new, glorious body.
“We will not be found naked.”
Bible students understand this phrase in different ways.

Some see it as the time between death and the resurrection, when the believer is with the Lord but not yet raised.
Others see it as a reference to being spiritually unprepared before God.
Either way, Paul's hope is not escape from the body.
It is the resurrection of the body.

Cross References

Revelation 3:18
> I advise you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire so you can be rich, and white clothes to wear so you can cover your shameful nakedness, and ointment to put on your eyes so you can see.

Revelation 16:15
> Look, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes on, so that he will not walk around naked and be ashamed.

Isaiah 61:10
> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD. My soul will be glad in my God, because He has dressed me in clothes of salvation and wrapped me in a robe of righteousness.

Spiritual Principle

The Christian hope is not escape from the body, but a glorious resurrection body.

IV. SWALLOWED UP BY LIFE

2 Corinthians 5:4 — Not Unclothed, but Clothed

“For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened—not that we wish to be unclothed, but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”
Paul repeats and explains.
“While we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened.”
Life in this body is heavy.
“Not that we wish to be unclothed.”
Paul did not want death for its own sake.
He did not hate his body.
“But to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.”
He wanted something better.
“So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”
This echoes 1 Corinthians 15.
Death swallowed up in victory.
Here, mortality swallowed up by life.
Life will win.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 15:54
> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

Romans 8:23
> And not only creation, but we ourselves, who have the Spirit as the first part of God's harvest, groan inwardly as we eagerly wait for our full adoption as God's children, the redemption of our bodies.

Isaiah 25:8
He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from every face and remove His people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.

Spiritual Principle

God's plan is for life to swallow up everything mortal.

Key Truth

Believers do not long for death.
They long for life—full, eternal, resurrection life.

V. GOD PREPARED US

2 Corinthians 5:5 — The Spirit as a Guarantee

“Now the One who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”
How can Paul be so sure?
“The One who has prepared us for this very thing is God.”
God made us for this.
Our eternal future is His plan from the beginning.
“Who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”
The Holy Spirit living in us is God's down payment.
He is the first part of what God has promised.
If God has given us His Spirit now, He will certainly give us the rest.

Cross References

Ephesians 1:14
The Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems those who belong to Him, to the praise of His glory.
2 Corinthians 1:22
He put His seal on us and gave us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee of what is to come.
Romans 8:16
The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Spiritual Principle

The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that our eternal future is secure.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Spirit within us is God's promise that glory is ahead of us.

VI. ALWAYS CONFIDENT

2 Corinthians 5:6 — At Home in the Body, Away from the Lord

“Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.”
Because of God's guarantee, Paul has confidence.
“Therefore we are always confident.”
Not sometimes.
Always.
“Knowing that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.”
Believers are with the Lord now by His Spirit.
But there is a fuller presence still to come.
In this life, we do not yet see Him face to face.
We are like travelers away from home.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 13:12
> For now we see only a dim reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only part, but then I will know fully, just as I am fully known.

Hebrews 11:13
> All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it from far away and welcomed it. They admitted that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

Philippians 1:23
> I am torn between the two. I long to leave this life and be with Christ, which is far better.

Spiritual Principle

Believers live with confidence, knowing their true home is with the Lord.

VII. WE WALK BY FAITH

2 Corinthians 5:7 — Not by Sight

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”
This is one of the best-known verses in the Bible.
“We walk by faith.”
To **walk** means to live day by day.
Believers live by trusting God.
“Not by sight.”
We cannot yet see Christ.
We cannot yet see heaven.
We cannot always see how God is working.
But we trust what God has said.
Faith is not believing without reason.
It is trusting God's word even when our eyes cannot see.

Cross References

Hebrews 11:1
Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.
Romans 8:24
For we were saved in this hope. But hope that is seen is not hope. Who hopes for what he already sees?
Galatians 2:20
I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Spiritual Principle

Believers live by trusting God's word, not by what they can see.

Application

Where is God asking you to walk by faith right now, even though you cannot see the way?

VIII. AT HOME WITH THE LORD

2 Corinthians 5:8 — Absent from the Body

“We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be absent from the body and at home with the Lord.”
Paul repeats his confidence.
“We are confident, I say.”
Then he states his preference.
“And would prefer to be absent from the body and at home with the Lord.”
For the believer, death means being with the Lord.
There is no waiting room.
No wandering.
To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.
Jesus told the thief on the cross, **“Today you will be with Me in paradise.”**
Paul was not eager to die because life was bad.
He was eager to be with Christ because Christ is so good.

Cross References

Philippians 1:23
I am torn between the two. I long to leave this life and be with Christ, which is far better.
Philippians 1:21
For me, living means living for Christ, and dying means gaining even more.
Luke 23:43
Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise.”

Spiritual Principle

For believers, death means being at home with the Lord.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

For the Christian, death is not leaving home—it is going home.

Application

If you have lost a believing loved one, take comfort.
They are at home with the Lord.

IX. OUR AIM IS TO PLEASE HIM

2 Corinthians 5:9 — At Home or Away

“So we make it our aim, whether at home or away, to please Him.”
Paul draws a practical conclusion.
“So we make it our aim.”
The word means to make something your highest ambition.
“Whether at home or away.”
Whether alive in this body or with the Lord in heaven—
“To please Him.”
Paul's greatest goal was to please Christ.
Not to please people.
Not to please himself.
To please the Lord.

Cross References

Romans 14:8
> If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Colossians 1:10
> so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God.

1 Thessalonians 4:1
> Finally, brothers and sisters, we taught you how to live in a way that pleases God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

Spiritual Principle

The highest ambition of a believer is to please the Lord.

Application

What is your greatest ambition?
Is it to please Christ?

X. THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 5:10 — Each One Receives What Is Due

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”
Paul gives a sobering reason to please Christ.
“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”

All.
Including Paul.
Including every believer.
The **judgment seat** was a raised platform where a ruler or judge sat to make decisions.
There was one in the marketplace of Corinth.
Paul himself had stood before it when he was brought before the Roman governor.
“That each one may receive what is due for the things done while in the body.”
Every believer will give an account of how he lived.
“Whether good or bad.”
This judgment is not about whether a believer is saved.
That was settled at the cross.
It is about how believers lived and served, and the reward they will receive.
Paul taught the same truth in 1 Corinthians 3, where each one's work is tested by fire.

Cross References

Romans 14:10
> So why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you look down on them? We will all stand before God's judgment seat.

Romans 2:6
> God will repay each person according to what he has done.

Revelation 22:12
> Look, I am coming soon! I am bringing My reward with Me, and I will repay each person for what they have done.

Spiritual Principle

Every believer will give an account to Christ for how he lived.

Key Truth

Salvation is by grace.
But how we live matters, and Christ will evaluate it.

XI. THE FEAR OF THE LORD

2 Corinthians 5:11 — We Persuade Others

“Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.”
Paul explains how the coming judgment affects his ministry.
“Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord.”
The **fear of the Lord** is deep reverence and awe.
Paul knew he would stand before Christ.
That made him serious about his calling.
“We persuade others.”
Paul tried to convince people of the truth of the gospel.
He reasoned with them.
He pleaded with them.
“But what we are is plain to God.”

God knew Paul's heart completely.
“And I hope it is also plain to your conscience.”
Paul hoped the Corinthians could also see that his motives were pure.

Cross References

Proverbs 9:10
Respect for the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowing the Holy One is understanding.
Acts 17:4
Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few leading women.
Hebrews 4:13
Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

Spiritual Principle

Reverence for the Lord makes us serious about reaching others.

XII. BOASTING IN APPEARANCE OR IN HEART

2 Corinthians 5:12 — An Answer for Your Critics

“We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.”
Paul explains why he is sharing all this.
“We are not commending ourselves to you again.”
He is not bragging.
“But giving you cause to boast about us.”
He wants the Corinthians to be able to defend him.
“So that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.”
The false teachers in Corinth were proud of outward things.
Impressive speaking.
Letters of recommendation.
Spiritual experiences.
But God looks at the heart.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 3:1
Are we starting to praise ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?
1 Samuel 16:7
But the LORD said to Samuel, “Don't look at his appearance or how tall he is, because I have rejected him. The LORD does not see as people see. People look at the outside, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

2 Corinthians 10:12

We do not dare to class ourselves or compare ourselves with some who praise themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they show they have no understanding.

Spiritual Principle

God values what is in the heart more than outward appearances.

XIII. BESIDE OURSELVES

2 Corinthians 5:13 — For God and for You

“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.”
Some people thought Paul was crazy.
He was so passionate about Christ that it seemed extreme.
Even Jesus' own family once said He was out of His mind.
“If we are beside ourselves, it is for God.”
If Paul seemed overly zealous, it was because of his devotion to God.
“If we are in our right mind, it is for you.”
When he spoke calmly and reasonably, it was to help the Corinthians.
Either way, Paul's life was not about himself.
It was for God and for others.

Cross References

Acts 26:24

While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus shouted, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you insane!”

Acts 26:25

But Paul replied, “I am not insane, most excellent Festus. What I am saying is true and reasonable.”

Mark 3:21

When His family heard about this, they went to take charge of Him, because they said, “He is out of His mind.”

Spiritual Principle

A life fully devoted to God may look strange to the world.

XIV. THE LOVE OF CHRIST COMPELS US

2 Corinthians 5:14 — One Died for All

“For the love of Christ compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, and therefore all died.”
Here is the driving force behind Paul's life.
“For the love of Christ compels us.”
The word **compels** means to press, to hold, to control.
Christ's love for Paul gripped him and drove him forward.

It was not guilt.
It was not fear.
It was love.
“Because we are convinced that One died for all.”
Jesus died in the place of others.
“And therefore all died.”
Those for whom Christ died are counted as having died with Him.
His death was their death.
The penalty for their sin was paid.
And their old life ended.

Cross References

Romans 5:15
> But the gift is not like the sin. Many died because of one man's sin, but God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflowed to many more.

Galatians 2:20
> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

1 John 3:16
> This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ gave His life for us. And we ought to give our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Spiritual Principle

The love of Christ, shown at the cross, is the strongest motivation for Christian living.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Duty can push us, but only the love of Christ can truly compel us.

XV. NO LONGER FOR THEMSELVES

2 Corinthians 5:15 — But for Him

“And He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”
Paul explains the purpose of Christ's death.
“He died for all.”
“So that those who live should no longer live for themselves.”
The old life was centered on self.
Christ died to free us from that.
“But for Him who died for them and rose again.”
Now we live for Jesus.
He died for us.
He rose for us.
So our lives belong to Him.
This is the natural response to such great love.

Cross References

Romans 14:8
If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.
Galatians 2:20
I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
1 Peter 4:2
As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but for the will of God.

Spiritual Principle

Christ died so that we would no longer live for ourselves, but for Him.

Application

Who are you living for?

XVI. NOT ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

2 Corinthians 5:16 — A New Way of Seeing

“So from now on we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we do so no longer.”
Christ's death and resurrection change how we see everyone.
“From now on we regard no one according to the flesh.”
We no longer judge people by worldly standards.
Not by appearance.
Not by wealth.
Not by status.
Not by background.
“Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh.”
Before his conversion, Paul saw Jesus from a worldly point of view.
He thought Jesus was a false messiah who deserved to die.
“We do so no longer.”
Now Paul sees Jesus as the risen Lord and Savior.
And he sees every person as someone for whom Christ died.

Cross References

John 6:63
The Spirit gives life; the flesh accomplishes nothing. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.
Colossians 3:2
Set your minds on the things above, not on earthly things.
Philippians 3:7
But whatever I once counted as gain, I now count as loss because of Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel changes how we see Christ and how we see every person.

Application

How do you see the people around you?
As the world sees them, or as people for whom Christ died?

XVII. A NEW CREATION

2 Corinthians 5:17 — The Old Has Passed Away

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”
This is one of the most beloved verses in the Bible.
“If anyone is in Christ.”
Anyone.
No matter their past.
No matter their background.
If they are joined to Christ by faith—
“He is a new creation.”
Not just improved.
Not just reformed.
Made new.
The same God who created the world creates new life in those who trust Christ.
“The old has passed away.”
The old life, the old identity, the old slavery to sin is gone.
“Behold, the new has come.”
Paul says **“behold”**—look!
Something new and wonderful is here.
This is the beginning of God's new creation, which will one day fill the whole world.

Cross References

Isaiah 43:19
> Look, I am doing something new! Now it springs up. Don't you see it? I am making a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

Galatians 6:15
> Being circumcised or not circumcised means nothing. What matters is being a new creation.

Revelation 21:5
> The One seated on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!”

Spiritual Principle

Everyone who is in Christ is made completely new.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

In Christ, your past does not define you; your new creation does.

Application

Are you living as the new creation God has made you?

XVIII. ALL THIS IS FROM GOD

2 Corinthians 5:18 — Reconciled Through Christ

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:”
Paul explains where this new life comes from.
“All this is from God.”
Salvation is God's work from start to finish.
“Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.”
Reconcile means to restore a broken relationship.
Because of sin, we were separated from God.
We were His enemies.
But God took the first step.
Through Christ, He brought us back to Himself.
“And gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”
Now God has given believers a job.
To tell others how they too can be reconciled to God.

Cross References

Romans 5:10
> For if, while we were God's enemies, we were brought back to God through the death of His Son, how much more, now that we have been brought back, will we be saved through His life!

Colossians 1:20
> and through Him to bring all things back to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood shed on the cross.

Ephesians 2:16
> and in one body to bring both groups back to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility.

Spiritual Principle

God Himself took the first step to restore our broken relationship with Him.

Key Truth

We did not find our way back to God.
God came to bring us back.

XIX. GOD WAS IN CHRIST

2 Corinthians 5:19 — Not Counting Their Sins

“namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sins against them, and He has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation.”

Paul explains the message.
“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.”
God was not standing far off.
He was in Christ, doing the work of reconciliation Himself.
And the scope is great:
The world.
The offer of reconciliation goes to all people.
“Not counting their sins against them.”
This is the heart of the good news.
God does not hold our sins against those who trust Christ.
Their sins have been dealt with on the cross.
“And He has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation.”
God has trusted believers with this precious message.

Cross References

Romans 5:19
> Just as many were made sinners through one man's disobedience, so many will be made righteous through one man's obedience.

Colossians 1:20
> and through Him to bring all things back to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood shed on the cross.

1 John 2:2
> He is the sacrifice that takes away our sins, and not only ours but also the sins of the whole world.

Spiritual Principle

In Christ, God does not count the sins of believers against them.

XX. AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

2 Corinthians 5:20 — Be Reconciled to God

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God.”
Paul describes the role of believers.
“We are ambassadors for Christ.”
An **ambassador** represents a king in a foreign country.
He does not speak his own message.
He speaks the message of the one who sent him.
Believers represent King Jesus in this world.
“As though God were making His appeal through us.”
When believers share the gospel, God Himself is speaking through them.
“We implore you on Christ's behalf.”
Paul does not just state facts.
He pleads.
“Be reconciled to God.”
This is the message.
God has done everything needed.

Now people must respond.
Come back to God.

Cross References

Ephesians 6:20
for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as I should.
Job 22:21
Come to know God and be at peace with Him. In this way good things will come to you.
Isaiah 55:6
Seek the LORD while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near.

Spiritual Principle

Every believer is an ambassador for Christ, carrying God's appeal to the world.

Application

Who in your life needs to hear God's appeal to be reconciled to Him?

XXI. HE WHO KNEW NO SIN

2 Corinthians 5:21 — The Righteousness of God

“For God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”
This verse is one of the clearest explanations of the gospel in the Bible.
“For God made Him who knew no sin.”
Jesus was completely sinless.
He never once disobeyed God.
“To be sin for us.”
On the cross, God placed our sin on Jesus.
He took our guilt.
He bore our punishment.
He was treated as if He were the sinner.
“So that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”
And those who trust Christ receive His righteousness.
They are treated as if they had lived His perfect life.
This is often called **the great exchange.**
Jesus took our sin.
We receive His righteousness.
He took what we deserved.
We receive what He deserved.
This is why God can reconcile sinners to Himself without ignoring their sin.

Cross References

Isaiah 53:6
All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the LORD has laid on Him the sin of us all.

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

1 Peter 2:24

He Himself carried our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.

Spiritual Principle

On the cross, Christ took our sin so that we could receive His righteousness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

He took my place so that I could take His.

XXII. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 5

1. Earthly Life Is Temporary, Heavenly Life Eternal

“If our earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God.”

Principle:

Our bodies are fragile tents, but God promises us an eternal dwelling.

2. Faith, Not Sight, Defines the Believer

“We walk by faith, not by sight.”

Principle:

We live with confidence, knowing absence from the body means presence with the Lord.

3. Every Life Will Be Judged

“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Principle:

All will stand before Christ's judgment seat to give account.

4. Christ's Love Compels Us

“The love of Christ compels us.”

Principle:

His death and resurrection call us to live no longer for ourselves but for Him.

5. In Christ, We Are New

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

Principle:

Salvation transforms us; old things pass away, and new life begins.

6. God Gives Us a Mission

“We are ambassadors for Christ.”

Principle:

As ambassadors of reconciliation, we carry the message that through Christ, sins are forgiven and fellowship with God is restored.

XXIII. THE TENT AND THE BUILDING

Verses 1–5 contrast our present bodies with our future ones.

Our Earthly Tent

- Temporary.
- Wears out.
- Brings groaning.
- Mortal.
- Made for life in this world.

Our Building from God

- Permanent.
- Eternal in the heavens.
- Brings full life.
- Swallowed up by life.
- Made by God, not human hands.

Key Truth

The tent will come down, but the building God has prepared will stand forever.

XXIV. THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Verse 10 teaches an important truth about the future.

Who Will Appear?

“We must all appear.” Every believer.

Who Is the Judge?

Christ Himself.

What Will Be Evaluated?

“The things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

What Is Not in Question?

The believer's salvation, which rests on Christ's finished work.

What Is the Result?

Each one receives what is due—reward for faithful service, or loss of reward.

How Should This Affect Us?

- It should make us aim to please Christ.
- It should give us reverence for the Lord.
- It should make us eager to reach others.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

We are saved by grace, but we will give an account for how we lived in that grace.

XXV. THE GREAT EXCHANGE

Verse 21 describes what happened on the cross.

What Christ Took

- Our sin.
- Our guilt.
- Our punishment.
- Our curse.

What We Receive

- His righteousness.
- His standing with God.
- His acceptance.
- His blessing.

Key Truth

Christ was treated as we deserved so that we could be treated as He deserved.

XXVI. THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION

Verses 18–21 explain the heart of the gospel.

The Problem

Sin separated us from God.

God's Initiative

“All this is from God.”

God's Method

“Through Christ.”

God's Mercy

“Not counting their sins against them.”

God's Means

“God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.”

God's Gift

“That in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

God's Messengers

“We are ambassadors for Christ.”

God's Appeal

“Be reconciled to God.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God has done everything needed to bring us back; now He calls everyone to come home.

XXVII. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 5 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

He Is the Judge

“The judgment seat of Christ.”

His Love Compels Us

“The love of Christ compels us.”

He Died for All and Rose Again

“He died for all... and rose again.”

In Him We Are New

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

God Was in Him Reconciling the World

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.”

He Knew No Sin, Yet Was Made Sin for Us

“God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jesus is the sinless Savior who took our sin, the living Lord we serve, and the coming Judge we will face.

XXVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why does Paul call our bodies “tents”?
Tents are temporary and wear out.
Our present bodies are not meant to last forever in their current form.

Question 2

What is the “building from God”?
It is the eternal, glorious resurrection body and home God has prepared for His people.

Question 3

Why do believers groan?
Life in this body brings pain, weakness, and longing.
We long for the glory God has promised.

Question 4

What is the Spirit's role in our future?
The Spirit is God's guarantee, like a down payment, that He will give us everything He has promised.

Question 5

What does it mean to walk by faith, not by sight?
To live each day trusting God's word, even when we cannot see how things will work out.

Question 6

What happens to believers when they die?
To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.

Question 7

What is the judgment seat of Christ?
It is where every believer will give an account for how they lived.
It is not about losing salvation, but about reward for faithful service.

Question 8

What motivated Paul's ministry?
The love of Christ, shown in His death for all.

Question 9

What does it mean to be a “new creation”?
Anyone in Christ is made completely new.
The old life has passed away, and new life has begun.

Question 10

What does it mean to be reconciled to God?
To have our broken relationship with God restored through Christ.

Question 11

What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ?
To represent Jesus in the world and carry His message: “Be reconciled to God.”

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 5 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 5 should cause believers to live:

- Confident about their eternal home.
- Walking by faith, not by sight.
- Unafraid of death.
- Aiming to please Christ above all.
- Remembering they will give an account.
- Compelled by Christ's love.
- Living as new creations.
- Sharing the message of reconciliation.

XXIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 5 asks several important questions.

Am I Holding This Life Too Tightly?

Do I remember that my body is only a tent?

Am I Walking by Faith?

Where do I need to trust God even when I cannot see?

Am I Afraid of Death?

Do I believe that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord?

What Is My Highest Ambition?

Is it to please Christ?

Am I Ready to Give an Account?

How would my life look before the judgment seat of Christ?

Is Christ's Love Compelling Me?

Or am I living for myself?

Am I Living as a New Creation?

Or am I still clinging to the old life?

Am I Acting as an Ambassador?

Who needs to hear me say, “Be reconciled to God”?

XXX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Ambassadors of Another Kingdom”

An ambassador lives in a foreign country.
He speaks its language.
He lives among its people.
But his true home is somewhere else.
And his loyalty belongs to the king who sent him.
That is the Christian life.
We live in this world, in temporary tents.
But our true home is with the Lord.
We serve a King who is not seen.
And we carry His message to people who need to hear it.
The message is not, **“Try harder.”**
It is not, **“Clean up your life.”**
It is, **“Be reconciled to God.”**
God has already done everything needed.
Christ took our sin.
He offers His righteousness.
This creates a powerful principle.
Every believer is on a mission.
We are not tourists in this world.

We are ambassadors.

Principle:

Live as an ambassador of heaven, carrying the King's message of reconciliation to everyone you meet.

XXXI. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 5 lifts our eyes to eternity and sends us into the world.
It reminds us that our bodies are temporary tents.
It assures us of an eternal home with the Lord.
It calls us to walk by faith and to please Christ.
It reminds us that we will give an account.
It shows us the love that compels us.
It declares that we are new creations.
And it gives us a mission.
2 Corinthians 5 therefore reminds us:
Never forget that this life is temporary.
Never fear death if you belong to Christ.
Never live for yourself.
Never forget that you are a new creation.
Never stop pleading with people to be reconciled to God.
The church does not need people who are comfortable in this world.
It needs:
Believers who walk by faith.
Servants compelled by Christ's love.
New creations who live for Him.
And ambassadors who carry His message.
The same gospel still calls:
Tell people that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.
Tell people that He does not count the sins of believers against them.
Tell people that Christ took their sin so they could receive His righteousness.
Tell people that anyone in Christ is a new creation.
And with all your heart:
Walk by faith.
Live for Christ.
Represent your King.
Plead with the world: be reconciled to God.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You that our earthly tents are not all there is.
Thank You for the eternal home You have prepared for us.
Thank You for the Holy Spirit, Your guarantee of all that is to come.
Thank You that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.
Thank You for the love of Christ, who died for all and rose again.
Thank You that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

Thank You that You took the first step to reconcile us to Yourself.
Thank You that You do not count the sins of believers against them.
Thank You that You made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become Your righteousness.
Forgive us when we have held this life too tightly.
Forgive us when we have walked by sight instead of by faith.
Forgive us when we have lived for ourselves instead of for Christ.
Forgive us when we have kept the message of reconciliation to ourselves.
Help us make it our aim to please You in everything.
Prepare us to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
Let the love of Christ compel us every day.
Help us live as new creations.
Make us faithful ambassadors.
And give us courage and love to plead with others: be reconciled to God.
“For God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” — 2 Corinthians 5:17

Central Truth

Because Christ died and rose for us, believers have an eternal home, live by faith to please Him, become new creations, and carry God's message of reconciliation to the world.

2 Corinthians 5 in One Sentence

Paul declares that believers have an eternal home from God, walk by faith as they aim to please the Christ before whom they will stand, are compelled by His love to live for Him as new creations, and serve as His ambassadors announcing that God made the sinless Christ to be sin for us so that we might become His righteousness.

2 Corinthians Chapter 6 —
Now Is the Day of Salvation

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 6 flows directly from the end of Chapter 5.
Paul had just said that believers are ambassadors for Christ.
God makes His appeal through them:
“Be reconciled to God.”
Now Paul applies that appeal to the Corinthians themselves.
They had received God's grace.
But Paul urges them not to receive it **“in vain.”**
God's grace should change their lives.
And there is urgency.
“Now is the day of salvation.”
Then Paul describes what his ministry has really been like.
He gives one of the most moving lists in the Bible.
Endurance, troubles, beatings, prison, riots, sleepless nights, hunger.
Purity, kindness, the Holy Spirit, sincere love.
Honor and dishonor.
Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.
Poor, yet making many rich.
Having nothing, yet possessing everything.
This was not the picture of a self-promoting leader.
It was the picture of a true servant of God.
Then Paul opens his heart.
He has held nothing back.
He asks the Corinthians to open their hearts to him in return.
Finally, Paul gives a strong call to holiness.
“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”
Believers are God's temple.
They must not be bound together with what is opposed to God.
And God gives a beautiful promise:
“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters.”
The chapter moves through four movements:

- Do Not Receive God's Grace in Vain (verses 1–2).
- Commending Ourselves as God's Servants (verses 3–10).
- Paul's Open Heart (verses 11–13).
- Be Separate from the World (verses 14–18).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 6 is:
Today is the day to respond to God's grace, and those who belong to Him are called to faithful service, open-hearted love, and holy separation, as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

I. NOT IN VAIN

2 Corinthians 6:1 — As God's Co-Workers

“As God's co-workers, we urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain.”
Paul continues his appeal from Chapter 5.
“As God's co-workers.”
Paul worked together with God in the work of reconciliation.
What an honor.
“We urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain.”
The Corinthians had received God's grace.
But Paul was concerned.
They were divided.
Some were questioning Paul and the gospel he preached.
Some were being drawn toward false teachers.
Paul did not want God's grace to make no difference in their lives.
Grace is not meant to be received and then ignored.
It is meant to transform.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 3:9
For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.
Hebrews 12:15
See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God, and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and spoil many.
Galatians 2:21
I do not set aside the grace of God. For if righteousness could be gained through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

Spiritual Principle

God's grace is meant to change our lives, not to be received and ignored.

Application

Is God's grace making a real difference in how you live?

II. NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

2 Corinthians 6:2 — The Time of God's Favor

“For He says: “In the time of My favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” Behold, now is the time of God's favor; behold, now is the day of salvation.”
Paul quotes Isaiah 49.
“In the time of My favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.”
In Isaiah, God promised a time when He would show favor and bring salvation.
Paul says that time has arrived.
“Behold, now is the time of God's favor.”

Not someday.
Now.
“Behold, now is the day of salvation.”
Jesus came.
He died and rose.
The door of salvation is open.
But the opportunity will not last forever.
Paul says **“behold”** twice.
He wants them to pay attention.
Today is the day to respond.

Cross References

Isaiah 49:8
> This is what the LORD says: “At the time I chose to show favor, I answered you. On the day of salvation, I helped you.”

Luke 4:19
> to announce the year of the Lord's favor.

Hebrews 3:15
> As it has been said: “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.”

Spiritual Principle

The time to respond to God's grace is now.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Tomorrow is not promised; today is the day of salvation.

Application

Is there something God is calling you to respond to today?
Do not wait.

III. NO OFFENSE IN ANYTHING

2 Corinthians 6:3 — That the Ministry Not Be Discredited

“We give no offense in anything, so that our ministry may not be discredited.”
Paul explains how he conducted himself.
“We give no offense in anything.”
Paul was careful not to put any unnecessary obstacle in anyone's path.
The gospel itself offends proud hearts.
But Paul never wanted his own behavior to be the reason people rejected it.
“So that our ministry may not be discredited.”
A servant's bad behavior can bring shame on the gospel.
Paul guarded his life so that nothing would hinder the message.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 10:32
Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God.
Romans 14:13
So let's stop judging one another. Instead, decide never to put anything in the way of a brother or sister that would make them stumble or fall.
Titus 2:8
and in speech that is sound and cannot be criticized, so that anyone who opposes you will be ashamed, having nothing bad to say about us.

Spiritual Principle

Our lives should never be the reason someone rejects the gospel.

IV. GREAT ENDURANCE

2 Corinthians 6:4 — Troubles, Hardships, Distresses

“Instead, in everything we commend ourselves as servants of God: in great endurance, in troubles, in hardships, in distresses,”
Paul now gives his real credentials.
The false teachers had letters of recommendation.
Paul had something else.
“In everything we commend ourselves as servants of God.”
His life was his recommendation.
And it begins with:
“In great endurance.”
Endurance is the ability to keep going under pressure.
It is the first mark of a true servant.
Then Paul lists three kinds of pressure he endured.
Troubles—general difficulties.
Hardships—situations that could not be avoided.
Distresses—being squeezed into tight places with no way out.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:23
Are they servants of Christ? I am speaking like a madman, but I am more so. I have worked much harder, been in prison more often, been beaten more severely, and faced death again and again.
1 Corinthians 4:1
So people should think of us as servants of Christ and as those trusted with the secret truths of God.
Romans 5:3
Not only that, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces endurance,

Spiritual Principle

The mark of a true servant of God is endurance under pressure.

V. BEATINGS AND SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

2 Corinthians 6:5 — What Paul Suffered

“in beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, and fastings;”
Paul continues with specific sufferings.
Beatings.
Paul was beaten with rods and whipped many times.
Imprisonments.
He was jailed for preaching the gospel.
Riots.
Mobs rose up against him in many cities.
Labors.
He worked hard with his hands and in ministry.
Sleepless nights.
He went without sleep because of work, worry, and danger.
Fastings.
He often went hungry.
These were not signs that Paul was failing.
They were signs that he was faithful.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:25
> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea.

Acts 16:23
> After they had been severely beaten, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was ordered to guard them carefully.

2 Corinthians 11:27
> I have worked hard and often gone without sleep. I have been hungry and thirsty and often without food. I have been cold and without enough clothing.

Spiritual Principle

Suffering for the gospel is not a sign of failure but of faithfulness.

VI. PURITY, KINDNESS, AND SINCERE LOVE

2 Corinthians 6:6 — The Character of a Servant

“in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in sincere love;”
Paul now turns from what he suffered to the character he showed.
Purity—a clean and holy life.
Knowledge—understanding of God's truth.
Patience—putting up with people and problems without giving up.

Kindness—treating others with goodness.
The Holy Spirit—living by the Spirit's power.
Sincere love—real love with no pretending.
Notice that hardship did not make Paul bitter.
It revealed the fruit of the Spirit in his life.

Cross References

Galatians 5:22
> But the fruit the Spirit produces is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

1 Timothy 4:12
> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. Instead, set an example for the believers in your speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

1 Peter 1:22
> Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for one another, love one another deeply from the heart.

Spiritual Principle

Hardship reveals the character the Spirit has produced in us.

Application

When you face hardship, does it bring out bitterness or the fruit of the Spirit?

VII. THE WEAPONS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

2 Corinthians 6:7 — In the Right Hand and the Left

“in the word of truth, in the power of God, with the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;”
Paul names his resources.
“In the word of truth.”
He relied on the gospel, God's true message.
“In the power of God.”
Not his own strength.
“With the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.”
A Roman soldier carried a sword in his right hand for attack.
He carried a shield in his left hand for defense.
Paul was fully equipped for both.
His weapons were not worldly.
They were righteousness—living rightly and trusting God's righteousness in Christ.

Cross References

Ephesians 6:11
> Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand firm against the devil's schemes.

Ephesians 6:14
> So stand firm, with the belt of truth fastened around your waist and the breastplate of righteousness in place.

Romans 6:13

> Do not offer any part of your body to sin as a tool for wickedness. Instead, offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer every part of yourself to Him as a tool for righteousness.

Spiritual Principle

God's servants fight spiritual battles with spiritual weapons.

VIII. GLORY AND DISHONOR

2 Corinthians 6:8 — Genuine, Yet Regarded as Impostors

“through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors;”
Paul now gives a series of contrasts.
“Through glory and dishonor.”
Sometimes Paul was honored.
Sometimes he was shamed.
“Bad report and good report.”
Some spoke well of him.
Some spread lies about him.
Paul kept serving either way.
“Genuine, yet regarded as impostors.”
Paul was a true apostle.
But his critics called him a fraud.
A faithful servant does not live for praise or quit because of criticism.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:10

> We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, but we are dishonored!

Matthew 5:11

> You are blessed when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil things about you because of Me.

1 Peter 4:14

> If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Spiritual Principle

A faithful servant keeps serving whether praised or criticized.

IX. DYING, YET WE LIVE

2 Corinthians 6:9 — Unknown, Yet Well-Known

“unknown, yet well-known; dying, yet we live on; punished, yet not killed;”
More contrasts.

“Unknown, yet well-known.”
To the world, Paul was a nobody.
But he was well known to God and to the churches.
“Dying, yet we live on.”
Paul faced death again and again.
Yet God kept him alive.
“Punished, yet not killed.”
Paul was beaten many times.
But he was not destroyed.
God's power kept him going.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 4:10
> We always carry in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

Psalm 118:18
> The LORD has disciplined me severely, but He has not handed me over to death.

2 Corinthians 1:9
> In fact, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God, who raises the dead.

Spiritual Principle

The world may see weakness, but God sees and sustains His servants.

X. HAVING NOTHING, YET POSSESSING EVERYTHING

2 Corinthians 6:10 — Sorrowful, Yet Always Rejoicing

“sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing everything.”
Paul ends the list with three of the most beautiful contrasts in Scripture.
“Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”
Paul knew real sorrow.
He wept.
He grieved.
But underneath the sorrow was a joy that never left.
Joy in Christ.
“Poor, yet making many rich.”
Paul had little money.
But he gave people the riches of the gospel.
Eternal life.
Forgiveness.
A relationship with God.
“Having nothing, yet possessing everything.”
Paul owned almost nothing.

But in Christ, he had everything.
Every believer is rich in Christ, no matter what they own on earth.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 3:21
So stop bragging about human leaders. Everything belongs to you.
Philippians 4:12
I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether having plenty or having little.
James 2:5
Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Hasn't God chosen people who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to receive the kingdom He promised to those who love Him?

Spiritual Principle

In Christ, believers can be sorrowful yet joyful, poor yet rich, having nothing yet possessing everything.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The world measures riches by what you hold; God measures them by Whom you have.

XI. OUR HEART IS WIDE OPEN

2 Corinthians 6:11 — Speaking Freely

“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open.”
Paul's tone becomes very personal.
“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians.”
Paul rarely addresses a church by name in the middle of a letter.
Here he does.
He is speaking directly to them.
He has been completely honest.
“Our heart is wide open.”
Paul had held nothing back.
He loved them deeply.
His heart had room for every one of them.

Cross References

Ephesians 6:19
Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, God will give me the right words so that I can boldly make known the secret truth of the good news,
2 Corinthians 7:2
Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, corrupted no one, and taken advantage of no one.
1 Thessalonians 2:8
We loved you so much that we were glad to share with you not only God's good news but our own lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

Spiritual Principle

True ministry flows from an open, loving heart.

XII. RESTRICTED IN YOUR AFFECTIONS

2 Corinthians 6:12 — The Problem Is Not Paul

“You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections.”
Paul gently points out a problem.
“You are not restricted by us.”
Paul was not holding back his love.
“But you are restricted in your own affections.”
The Corinthians were holding back their love for Paul.
Their hearts had become narrow and closed.
The problem in the relationship was not on Paul's side.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 12:15
> So I will gladly spend everything I have and even spend myself for you. If I love you more, will you love me less?

1 John 3:17
> If someone has enough to live on and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no pity, how can God's love be in him?

2 Corinthians 7:2
> Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, corrupted no one, and taken advantage of no one.

Spiritual Principle

Closed hearts hinder fellowship more than anything outside us.

XIII. OPEN YOUR HEARTS ALSO

2 Corinthians 6:13 — As to My Children

“As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open your hearts also.”
Paul makes a tender appeal.
“As a fair exchange.”
Paul had opened his heart to them.
Now he asks them to do the same.
“I speak as to my children.”
Paul was their spiritual father.
He spoke with a father's love.
“Open your hearts also.”
Love should be returned.
Fellowship should flow both ways.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:14
I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you as my dear children.
3 John 1:4
Nothing gives me greater joy than to hear that my children are living in the truth.
Galatians 4:19
My dear children, I am again going through the pain of childbirth for you until Christ is formed in you.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy relationships in the church require open hearts on both sides.

Application

Is there someone in your church who has opened their heart to you, but you have kept yours closed?

XIV. DO NOT BE UNEQUALLY YOKED

2 Corinthians 6:14 — Light and Darkness

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what communion has light with darkness?”
Paul now gives a strong command.
“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”
A **yoke** was a wooden beam that joined two animals together to pull a plow.
The Law of Moses said not to yoke an ox and a donkey together.
They were different animals.
They walked at different speeds.
They would pull in different directions.
Paul uses this picture for believers.
Believers should not be bound in close partnerships with unbelievers where they would be pulled away from Christ.
This includes marriage.
It can also include business partnerships or other close commitments that would compromise a believer's faith.
It also seems to apply to the false teachers who were drawing the Corinthians away.
It does **not** mean believers should avoid all contact with unbelievers.
In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul said that would mean leaving the world.
Believers are called to love and reach unbelievers.
But they must not be **yoked**—bound in a way that pulls them away from God.
Paul then asks five questions.
“What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?”
“What communion has light with darkness?”
They are opposites.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 22:10
Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together.

Ephesians 5:11
Have nothing to do with the worthless deeds of darkness. Instead, expose them.
1 Corinthians 15:33
Do not be fooled: “Bad company ruins good character.”

Spiritual Principle

Believers must not be bound in close partnerships that pull them away from Christ.

Key Truth

Love unbelievers.
Reach unbelievers.
But do not be yoked to anything that pulls you from God.

XV. CHRIST AND BELIAL

2 Corinthians 6:15 — What Does a Believer Share?

“What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever?”
Paul continues his questions.
“What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?”
Belial was a name for Satan.
It means **worthlessness.**
Christ and Satan are complete opposites.
There can be no agreement between them.
“Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever?”
In the deepest spiritual sense, believers and unbelievers follow different masters.
They live for different purposes.
They are headed in different directions.

Cross References

1 Kings 18:21
Elijah went before all the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him. But if Baal is God, follow him.” But the people said nothing.
1 Corinthians 10:21
You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too. You cannot share in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.
Matthew 6:24
No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Spiritual Principle

No one can be fully devoted to Christ while bound to what opposes Him.

XVI. THE TEMPLE OF THE LIVING GOD

2 Corinthians 6:16 — I Will Dwell in Them

“What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them; I will be their God, and they shall be My people.””
Paul asks his final question.
“What agreement has the temple of God with idols?”
Corinth was full of temples to idols.
God's temple and an idol's temple could never go together.
“For we are the temple of the living God.”
Believers are God's temple.
God lives among His people.
Then Paul combines several Old Testament promises.
“I will dwell in them and walk among them.”
God's presence among His people.
“I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”
This is the heart of God's covenant.
From the beginning, God's plan was to live with His people.
In Christ, that plan is fulfilled.

Cross References

Leviticus 26:12
I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be My people.
Ezekiel 37:27
My dwelling place will be with them. I will be their God, and they will be My people.
1 Corinthians 3:16
Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives among you?

Spiritual Principle

Because God lives among His people, they must keep His temple holy.

Key Truth

God does not just visit His people.
He lives with them.

XVII. COME OUT AND BE SEPARATE

2 Corinthians 6:17 — I Will Receive You

“Therefore, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.””
Paul quotes Isaiah.
“Come out from among them and be separate.”
In Isaiah, God called His people to leave Babylon and its idols behind.

Paul applies this to believers.
Separate yourselves from sin and idolatry.
This is not about leaving the world physically.
It is about refusing to share in the world's sin.
“Touch no unclean thing.”
Keep yourselves pure.
“And I will receive you.”
God does not just call us away from sin.
He calls us to Himself.
He welcomes us.
Separation from sin is really separation to God.

Cross References

Isaiah 52:11
> Leave! Leave! Get out of there! Do not touch anything unclean! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the LORD's holy things.

Jeremiah 51:45
> Come out of her, My people! Run for your lives! Escape the fierce anger of the LORD.

Numbers 16:26
> He warned the people, “Move away from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything that belongs to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins.”

Spiritual Principle

God calls His people to separate from sin so that they can draw near to Him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Holiness is not just turning away from sin; it is turning toward God.

XVIII. A FATHER TO YOU

2 Corinthians 6:18 — My Sons and Daughters

“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”
Paul ends with one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible.
“I will be a Father to you.”
God is not a distant ruler.
He is a Father.
“And you shall be My sons and daughters.”
Notice that Paul includes **daughters.**
In the Old Testament promise to David, God spoke of a son.
Paul widens it to include every believer, men and women alike.
All are God's children.
“Says the Lord Almighty.”
The One who makes this promise is all-powerful.
The Almighty God becomes our Father.
This is why holiness matters.
We are not just following rules.

We are living as children of a holy Father.

Cross References

2 Samuel 7:14
I will be his Father, and he will be My son. When he does wrong, I will correct him with the rod of men and with blows from human hands.

Jeremiah 31:9
They will come weeping, and I will lead them as they pray. I will guide them beside streams of water on a smooth path where they will not stumble. For I am Israel's Father, and Ephraim is My firstborn son.

Revelation 21:7
Whoever overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God, and he will be My child.

Spiritual Principle

The Lord Almighty adopts believers as His sons and daughters.

Key Truth

You are not just forgiven.
You are family.

XIX. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 6

1. God's Grace Must Not Be Wasted

“Now is the day of salvation.”

Principle:

Salvation is urgent—today is the day to respond.

2. True Ministry Is Proven in Trials

“In great endurance, in troubles, in hardships, in distresses.”

Principle:

Hardship, endurance, and sincerity display the power of God at work in His servants.

3. Christian Joy Transcends Circumstances

“Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”

Principle:

Believers may appear sorrowful and poor, yet in Christ they rejoice and possess everything.

4. Open Hearts Are Needed

“Open your hearts also.”

Principle:

Paul calls for mutual love and genuine fellowship among believers.

5. Separation from Sin Is Required

“Come out from among them and be separate.”

Principle:

God's people are His temple, called to holiness, distinct from idolatry and unbelief.

6. God Adopts His People

“You shall be My sons and daughters.”

Principle:

Through Christ, we are welcomed as sons and daughters of the Almighty Father.

XX. THE MARKS OF A TRUE SERVANT

Verses 4–10 give Paul's true credentials.

What He Endured

- Troubles, hardships, and distresses.
- Beatings and imprisonments.
- Riots.
- Hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger.

The Character He Showed

- Purity and knowledge.
- Patience and kindness.
- The Holy Spirit.
- Sincere love.

The Resources He Used

- The word of truth.
- The power of God.
- The weapons of righteousness.

The Paradoxes He Lived

- Genuine, yet regarded as impostors.
- Unknown, yet well-known.
- Dying, yet living.
- Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.
- Poor, yet making many rich.
- Having nothing, yet possessing everything.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The true servant's credentials are not written on paper but on a life of faithful endurance.

XXI. UNEQUALLY YOKED

Verses 14–18 call believers to holiness.

What the Command Means

Believers should not be bound in close partnerships that pull them away from Christ.

Where It Applies

- Marriage, which is the closest partnership of all.
- Close business or personal commitments that would compromise faith.
- Spiritual alliances with false teaching or idolatry.

What It Does Not Mean

- It does not mean avoiding all contact with unbelievers.
- It does not mean being unkind or proud toward them.
- It does not mean leaving a marriage that already exists, as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 7.

Five Contrasts

- Righteousness and lawlessness.
- Light and darkness.
- Christ and Belial.
- Believer and unbeliever.
- The temple of God and idols.

Key Truth

Believers are called to be in the world, loving it, but not yoked to it.

XXII. GOD'S PROMISES TO HIS PEOPLE

Verses 16–18 combine several Old Testament promises.

God's Presence

“I will dwell in them and walk among them.”

God's Covenant

“I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

God's Welcome

“I will receive you.”

God's Fatherhood

“I will be a Father to you.”

Our Adoption

“You shall be My sons and daughters.”

Key Truth

The call to holiness is wrapped in the promise of God's presence and fatherly love.

XXIII. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 6 TEACHES ABOUT GOD

He Shows Favor

“Now is the time of God's favor.”

He Saves

“Now is the day of salvation.”

He Works Through His Servants

“As God's co-workers.”

He Lives Among His People

“I will dwell in them and walk among them.”

He Is a Father

“I will be a Father to you.”

He Is Almighty

“Says the Lord Almighty.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Almighty God who calls us to holiness is the loving Father who welcomes us home.

XXIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does it mean to receive God's grace “in vain”?

To receive grace but let it make no real difference in how we live.

Question 2

Why does Paul say “now is the day of salvation”?
Christ has come, and the door of salvation is open.
People should respond today, not put it off.

Question 3

Why was Paul careful not to give offense?
He did not want his behavior to discredit the gospel or keep anyone from Christ.

Question 4

What kinds of suffering did Paul endure?
Beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger.

Question 5

What character did Paul show in his suffering?
Purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, and sincere love.

Question 6

What are the “weapons of righteousness”?
Spiritual weapons for attack and defense, rooted in God's righteousness and right living.

Question 7

How could Paul be “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”?
He felt real sorrow, but his deep joy in Christ never left him.

Question 8

How could Paul have nothing, yet possess everything?
He had few earthly possessions, but in Christ he had every spiritual blessing.

Question 9

Why did Paul ask the Corinthians to open their hearts?
He had opened his heart to them, but they were holding back their love for him.

Question 10

What does it mean to be “unequally yoked”?
To be bound in a close partnership with unbelievers that pulls a believer away from Christ.

Question 11

Does this mean believers should avoid unbelievers?
No.

Believers are called to love and reach unbelievers.
They must not be bound in ways that compromise their faith.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 6 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 6 should cause believers to live:

- Responding to God's grace today.
- Guarding their lives so they do not discredit the gospel.
- Enduring hardship with faithfulness.
- Showing the fruit of the Spirit in hard times.
- Rejoicing even in sorrow.
- Opening their hearts to one another.
- Avoiding partnerships that pull them from Christ.
- Living as children of the Almighty Father.

XXV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 6 asks several important questions.

Is God's Grace Changing My Life?

Or am I receiving it in vain?

Is There Something I Need to Respond to Today?

Am I putting off what God is calling me to do?

Does My Life Help or Hinder the Gospel?

Is there anything in how I live that might keep someone from Christ?

How Do I Handle Hardship?

Does it bring out bitterness or the fruit of the Spirit?

Do I Have Joy in Sorrow?

Is my joy rooted in Christ, not in circumstances?

Is My Heart Open to Others?

Or am I holding back love?

Am I Unequally Yoked?

Is there a partnership pulling me away from Christ?

Do I Live as God's Child?

Do I remember that the Almighty is my Father?

XXVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Having Nothing, Possessing Everything”

The world counts riches by what you own.
Houses.
Money.
Possessions.
Reputation.
Paul had almost none of these.
He was poor.
He was often hungry.
He was beaten and mocked.
The world would say he had nothing.
But Paul said he possessed everything.
Why?
Because he had Christ.
In Christ, he had forgiveness.
He had eternal life.
He had a Father in heaven.
He had a home that would last forever.
He had joy that suffering could not take away.
This creates a powerful principle.
The richest person in the world is not the one with the most possessions.
It is the one who has Christ.

Principle:

If you have Christ, you have everything that truly matters.

XXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 6 calls believers to respond to God's grace today.
It shows what true ministry looks like.
It calls for open hearts.
And it calls God's people to be holy.
Paul did not just preach this.
He lived it.
Through beatings and sleepless nights.
Through honor and dishonor.
Through sorrow and joy.
2 Corinthians 6 therefore reminds us:
Never receive God's grace in vain.
Never put off responding to God.
Never let your life discredit the gospel.
Never close your heart to God's people.

Never be yoked to what pulls you from Christ.
The church does not need people who look impressive.
It needs:
Servants who endure.
Hearts that are open.
Lives that are holy.
And children who know their Father.
The same God still calls:
Tell people that now is the day of salvation.
Tell people that God offers favor and help.
Tell people that in Christ they can have everything.
Tell people that God wants to be their Father.
And as you live:
Respond to grace today.
Endure with joy.
Open your heart.
Live as God's child.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for the grace You have poured out on us.
Thank You that now is the time of Your favor and now is the day of salvation.
Thank You for faithful servants who endured hardship to bring the gospel to us.
Thank You that in Christ we can be sorrowful yet always rejoicing.
Thank You that we can be poor yet making many rich.
Thank You that we can have nothing yet possess everything.
Thank You that we are Your temple and that You dwell among us.
Thank You that You are our Father, and we are Your sons and daughters.
Forgive us when we have received Your grace in vain.
Forgive us when we have put off responding to You.
Forgive us when our lives have discredited the gospel.
Forgive us when we have closed our hearts to others.
Forgive us when we have been yoked to what pulls us away from You.
Help us respond to Your grace today.
Give us endurance in hardship.
Fill us with purity, patience, kindness, and sincere love.
Open our hearts to Your people.
Keep us holy and separate from sin.
And help us live every day as children of the Lord Almighty.
“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Behold, now is the time of God's favor; behold, now is the day of salvation.” — 2 Corinthians 6:2

Central Truth

Today is the day to respond to God's grace, and those who belong to Him are called to faithful service, open-hearted love, and holy separation, as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

2 Corinthians 6 in One Sentence

Paul urges the Corinthians not to receive God's grace in vain because now is the day of salvation, describes the endurance and character that mark true servants of God, pleads with them to open their hearts, and calls them to holy separation as the temple of the living God and the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 7 — Godly Sorrow Produces Repentance

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 7 is one of the most tender chapters Paul ever wrote.
It begins by finishing the call to holiness from Chapter 6.
God has promised to live among His people and to be their Father.
So His people must respond.
“Let us cleanse ourselves from everything that defiles body and spirit.”
Then Paul opens his heart again.
He asks the Corinthians to make room for him in their hearts.
He had not wronged them, cheated them, or used them.
He loved them, and he was ready to live or die with them.
Then Paul picks up the story he left off in Chapter 2.

He had been waiting anxiously for Titus.
He had sent a painful letter to Corinth, and he did not know how they would respond.
When he came into Macedonia, he had no rest.
“Conflicts outside, fears within.”
But God, who comforts the downcast, sent Titus.
And Titus brought good news.
The Corinthians had listened.
They were sorry.
They had repented.
This leads to one of the most important teachings on repentance in the Bible.
There are two kinds of sorrow.
Godly sorrow leads to repentance and salvation.
Worldly sorrow leads to death.
The chapter ends with joy.
Paul is comforted, Titus is refreshed, and Paul has complete confidence in the Corinthians.
The chapter moves through five movements:

- Cleansing Ourselves in Holiness (verse 1).
- Paul's Appeal for Affection (verses 2–4).
- God's Comfort Through Titus (verses 5–7).
- Godly Sorrow Brings Repentance (verses 8–11).
- Paul's Joy in Their Obedience (verses 12–16).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 7 is:
God calls His people to holiness, comforts the discouraged through one another, and uses godly sorrow to produce true repentance that leads to salvation, restored relationships, and lasting joy.

I. PERFECTING HOLINESS

2 Corinthians 7:1 — Cleansing Ourselves

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that defiles body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”
This verse belongs closely with the end of Chapter 6.
“Since we have these promises.”
Which promises?
God said, **“I will dwell in them and walk among them.”**
He said, **“I will receive you.”**
He said, **“I will be a Father to you.”**
Holiness is our response to God's love, not our way of earning it.
“Beloved.”
Paul does not scold them.
He speaks as one who loves them.
“Let us cleanse ourselves.”
Notice that Paul says **“us.”**
He includes himself.
Holiness is not passive.
Believers must take action to turn away from what is unclean.
“From everything that defiles body and spirit.”
Sin can stain both the body and the spirit.

Some sins are outward, like sexual immorality or drunkenness.
Some sins are inward, like pride, bitterness, or a heart drawn to idols.
God wants both cleansed.
“Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”
“Perfecting” means bringing to completion.
Holiness is a lifelong process of growing more like Christ.
And it is done **“in the fear of God”**—with deep reverence for who He is.

Cross References

1 John 3:3
Everyone who holds on to this hope in Christ keeps making himself pure, because Jesus is pure.
1 Peter 1:16
The Scriptures say, “Be holy, because I am holy.”
1 Thessalonians 5:23
May the God of peace make you completely holy, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept without blame until our Lord Jesus Christ comes back.

Spiritual Principle

God's promises are not a reason to relax about sin; they are the reason to pursue holiness.

Application

Is there anything in your body or spirit that God is asking you to clean out?

II. MAKE ROOM FOR US

2 Corinthians 7:2 — A Clear Conscience

“Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, corrupted no one, and taken advantage of no one.”
In Chapter 6, Paul said, **“Open your hearts also.”**
Now he repeats the appeal.
“Make room for us in your hearts.”
Some in Corinth had pushed Paul out of their hearts.
False teachers had been criticizing him.
Paul asks them to welcome him again.
Then he defends his conduct.
“We have wronged no one.”
He had not treated anyone unfairly.
“Corrupted no one.”
He had not led anyone into false teaching or immoral living.
“Taken advantage of no one.”
He had not used them for money or personal gain.
Some may have accused Paul of these very things.
Paul could answer with a clear conscience.

Cross References

Acts 20:33
I never wanted anyone's silver, gold, or clothes.
1 Thessalonians 2:5
As you know, we never used flattering words, and we never used the gospel as a cover for greed. God is our witness.
1 Samuel 12:4
The people answered Samuel, “You have never cheated us or mistreated us. You have never taken anything from anyone.”

Spiritual Principle

A leader with clean hands can ask for an open heart.

Application

Could you say, as Paul did, that you have taken advantage of no one?

III. TO LIVE AND TO DIE TOGETHER

2 Corinthians 7:3 — In Our Hearts

“I do not say this to condemn you; for I have already said that you are in our hearts, to live and to die together.”
Paul did not want them to misunderstand him.
“I do not say this to condemn you.”
He was not defending himself in order to accuse them.
He was not trying to make them feel guilty.
“You are in our hearts.”
Paul had said this before.
The Corinthians were not just a church he had planted.
They were people he loved.
“To live and to die together.”
This is the language of the deepest loyalty.
Paul was saying, **“Whatever happens, I am with you.”**
In life or in death, he would not abandon them.

Cross References

Philippians 1:7
It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, because you are in my heart. Whether I am in chains or defending the gospel, you all share in God's grace with me.
2 Corinthians 3:2
You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, and everyone can know it and read it.
Acts 21:13
Paul answered, “Why are you crying and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be tied up but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Spiritual Principle

Real Christian love is committed for life, not just for convenience.

Application

Are you committed to your church family in good times and hard times?

IV. JOY IN AFFLICTION

2 Corinthians 7:4 — Overflowing with Joy

“I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am filled with comfort, and in all our affliction, I overflow with joy.”
Paul's tone now becomes warm and joyful.
“I have great confidence in you.”
Paul could speak openly and boldly with them.
“I take great pride in you.”
Even with all their problems, Paul was proud of what God was doing in them.
“I am filled with comfort.”
The news from Titus had filled Paul's heart.
“In all our affliction, I overflow with joy.”
Paul was still suffering.
His troubles had not disappeared.
But his joy was overflowing anyway.
Joy and affliction can live side by side in a believer's heart.

Cross References

Colossians 1:24
> I am glad to suffer for you now. In my body I am sharing in Christ's sufferings for the sake of His body, the church.

2 Corinthians 1:4
> God comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort others in their troubles with the same comfort God gave us.

James 1:2
> My brothers and sisters, when you face all kinds of trials, think of it as a reason for great joy.

Spiritual Principle

God can fill a heart with joy even while trouble surrounds it.

Key Truth

Joy is not the absence of affliction; it is the presence of God's comfort in the middle of it.

V. CONFLICTS OUTSIDE, FEARS WITHIN

2 Corinthians 7:5 — No Rest in Macedonia

“For when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side—conflicts outside, fears within.”
Paul now returns to the story he began in Chapter 2.
There he said he had no peace of mind because he did not find Titus in Troas.

So he went on to Macedonia.
“Our bodies had no rest.”
Paul was physically worn out.
“We were afflicted on every side.”
Trouble came from every direction.
“Conflicts outside.”
There were fights and opposition from others.
“Fears within.”
Inside, Paul was anxious.
He was worried about the Corinthians.
He was worried about Titus.
This is an honest look at a great apostle.
Paul was not a superhero.
He felt fear.
He got tired.
He struggled with worry.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 32:25
Out in the street the sword will take their children, and inside their homes terror will strike.
2 Corinthians 2:13
My spirit could not rest, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.
2 Corinthians 4:8
We are pressed hard on every side, but we are not crushed. We are confused, but we do not give up hope.

Spiritual Principle

Even faithful servants of God can feel exhausted and afraid.

Application

Do you feel free to be honest with God about your fears?

VI. THE GOD WHO COMFORTS THE DOWNCAST

2 Corinthians 7:6 — The Arrival of Titus

“But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the arrival of Titus,”
Notice the turning point.
“But God.”
Two of the most hopeful words in the Bible.
Paul was worn out and afraid.
But God stepped in.
“Who comforts the downcast.”
This describes who God is.

He is the God who lifts up those who are low.
He notices the discouraged.
He cares for those who are sinking.
“Comforted us by the arrival of Titus.”
How did God comfort Paul?
Not through a vision.
Not through an angel.
Through a friend walking through the door.
God often sends His comfort through His people.

Cross References

Isaiah 49:13
> Shout for joy, heavens! Celebrate, earth! The Lord comforts His people and shows mercy to those who are suffering.

Isaiah 66:13
> The Lord says, “I will comfort you the way a mother comforts her child.”

2 Corinthians 1:4
> God comforts us in every trouble, so that we can turn and comfort others with the same comfort we received from Him.

Spiritual Principle

God comforts the discouraged, and He often does it through the people He sends.

Application

Who could God use you to comfort this week?

VII. COMFORT UPON COMFORT

2 Corinthians 7:7 — Their Longing, Sorrow, and Zeal

“and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you gave him. He told us of your longing for me, your deep sorrow, and your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.”
Paul was comforted in two ways.
First, by seeing Titus.
Second, by the news Titus brought.
“The comfort you gave him.”
The Corinthians had encouraged Titus.
Now Titus passed that encouragement on to Paul.
Comfort spreads.
Titus told Paul three things about the Corinthians.
“Your longing for me.”
They wanted to see Paul again.
“Your deep sorrow.”
They were truly sorry for what had happened.
“Your zeal for me.”
They were now eager to stand with Paul.
“So that I rejoiced even more.”

Paul's fear turned into joy.

Cross References

Philippians 2:28
So I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you will be glad, and I will have less to worry about.

2 Corinthians 2:13
My mind had no peace because Titus, my brother, was not there to meet me.

Romans 15:32
Then, if God wants it, I can come to you with joy and be refreshed by spending time with you.

Spiritual Principle

Comfort passes from heart to heart in the body of Christ.

Key Truth

When you encourage one believer, your encouragement often reaches others you will never meet.

VIII. THE PAINFUL LETTER

2 Corinthians 7:8 — No Regret

“For though my letter made you grieve, I do not regret it—though I did regret it for a while, for I see that my letter grieved you, though only for a season.”
Paul now talks about the letter he had written.
Bible students are not sure exactly which letter this was.
Some think it was 1 Corinthians.
Many think it was a separate, painful letter that has not been preserved.
Either way, Paul's words had hurt them.
“Though my letter made you grieve, I do not regret it.”
Paul was not sorry he sent it.
“Though I did regret it for a while.”
But Paul is honest.
After he sent it, he worried.
Had he been too hard?
Would it drive them away?
“Though only for a season.”
The pain was real, but it was temporary.
Sometimes love must say hard things.
And the one who says them may feel the pain too.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 2:4
I wrote to you with a troubled and hurting heart and with many tears. I did not want to cause you pain. I wanted you to know how much I love you.

Hebrews 12:11
No discipline feels good while it is happening; it hurts. But later it produces a peaceful harvest of right living for those who have been trained by it.

Proverbs 27:6
The wounds a friend gives you can be trusted, but an enemy covers you with kisses.

Spiritual Principle

Loving correction may hurt for a season, but it is meant to heal.

Application

Is there a hard but loving word you need to speak, or to receive?

IX. SORROW THAT LEADS TO REPENTANCE

2 Corinthians 7:9 — Grieved in a Godly Way

“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were grieved in a godly way, so that you suffered no loss through us.”
Paul is careful to explain his joy.
“Not that you were made sorry.”
Paul took no pleasure in their pain.
“But that your sorrow led to repentance.”
Sorrow was not the goal.
Repentance was the goal.
Repentance means a change of mind and heart that leads to a change of direction.
It means turning from sin and turning toward God.
“You were grieved in a godly way.”
Their sorrow was directed toward God.
It was not just embarrassment.
It was not just being sorry they got caught.
They saw their sin as God sees it.
“So that you suffered no loss through us.”
Paul's letter did not harm them.
In the end, it helped them.

Cross References

Psalm 51:17
What God wants is a broken spirit. God, You will not turn away a heart that is broken and sorry for sin.
Matthew 5:4
God blesses those who mourn, because He will comfort them.
Joel 2:13
Do not just tear your clothes; tear your hearts instead. Come back to the Lord your God, because He is kind and full of mercy. He is slow to get angry and full of love.

Spiritual Principle

The goal of sorrow over sin is not misery but repentance.

Key Truth

Feeling bad is not the same as repenting.

X. TWO KINDS OF SORROW

2 Corinthians 7:10 — Godly Sorrow and Worldly Sorrow

“For godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow produces death.”
This is the key verse of the chapter.
Paul describes two kinds of sorrow.

Godly Sorrow

“Godly sorrow produces repentance.”
Godly sorrow grieves because sin offends God.
It turns a person back to Him.
“That leads to salvation.”
It leads to forgiveness, healing, and life.
“And leaves no regret.”
No one ever regrets turning back to God.

Worldly Sorrow

“But worldly sorrow produces death.”
Worldly sorrow is sorry about the consequences.
It is sorry about getting caught.
It is sorry about losing reputation.
But it does not turn to God.
It turns inward.
It can lead to despair, bitterness, and spiritual death.
The New Testament gives a clear example of both.
Judas felt terrible after betraying Jesus.
But he did not turn to Jesus.
He went away in despair.
Peter also failed Jesus by denying Him three times.
He wept bitterly.
But he came back.
And Jesus restored him.

Cross References

Matthew 27:5
Judas threw the silver coins into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.
Luke 22:62
Peter went outside and cried with deep sorrow.
Psalm 51:17
The sacrifice God wants is a humble spirit. He will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry.

Spiritual Principle

Godly sorrow turns us toward God; worldly sorrow turns us away from Him.

Spiritual Warning

Do not settle for regret that only makes you feel bad. Let your sorrow bring you back to God.

XI. THE FRUIT OF REPENTANCE

2 Corinthians 7:11 — What Godly Sorrow Produced

“See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what readiness to see justice done! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in this matter.”
Paul now shows what real repentance looks like.
It produced seven things in the Corinthians.
“What earnestness.”
They began to take the matter seriously.
“What eagerness to clear yourselves.”
They wanted to make things right.
“What indignation.”
They became angry at the sin itself.
“What fear.”
They had a new reverence for God.
“What longing.”
They longed to be restored to Paul.
“What zeal.”
They acted with energy and passion.
“What readiness to see justice done!”
They were willing to deal with the wrong.
“At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in this matter.”
This does not mean they had never done wrong.
It means that by their response, they had now handled the matter rightly.
True repentance is not only a feeling.
It produces visible fruit.

Cross References

Romans 12:11
Never let your eagerness fade. Keep your spiritual fire burning as you serve the Lord.
Titus 2:14
Jesus gave Himself for us to set us free from all evil and to make us His own people, pure and eager to do good.
Acts 24:16
So I always try hard to keep my conscience clear before God and before people.

Spiritual Principle

True repentance shows itself in changed attitudes and changed actions.

Application

When you repent, does it lead to real change?

XII. WHY PAUL WROTE

2 Corinthians 7:12 — Their Earnestness Revealed

“So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, or the one who suffered it, but that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.”
Paul explains the deeper purpose of his letter.
“Not for the sake of the one who did the wrong.”
This likely refers to the offender mentioned in Chapter 2.
Bible students differ on who he was.
Some connect him with the man in 1 Corinthians 5.
Many think he was someone who had openly opposed or insulted Paul.
“Or the one who suffered it.”
This may refer to Paul himself, or to someone else who was hurt.
Paul does not name anyone.
“But that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you.”
The main purpose was for the church to see its own heart.
Would they stand for what was right?
Would they show their care for Paul?
“In the sight of God.”
All of this happened before God.
The real issue was their faithfulness to Him.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 2:9
That is why I wrote to you. I wanted to test you and find out whether you would obey in everything.
2 Corinthians 2:4
I wrote with deep pain and many tears, not to hurt you, but so you would know how deep my love for you is.
Galatians 6:1
Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should gently help that person back. But watch yourself, or you may be tempted too.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes allows hard situations to reveal what is really in our hearts.

Application

What has a recent trial shown you about your own heart?

XIII. A REFRESHED SPIRIT

2 Corinthians 7:13 — The Joy of Titus

“Because of this, we have been comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.”
“Because of this, we have been comforted.”
The church's response comforted Paul.
“We rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus.”
Paul was not only glad for himself.
He was glad for Titus.
Titus may have gone to Corinth nervous about how he would be received.
Instead he was welcomed.
“His spirit has been refreshed by you all.”
“Refreshed” means given rest and new strength.
The Corinthians had become a blessing to the very man sent to correct them.
This is what happens when a church receives correction humbly.
Instead of conflict, there is refreshment.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 16:18
They lifted my spirit, and yours too. People like this deserve to be honored.
Philemon 1:7
Your love has brought me great joy and encouragement, my brother, because you have refreshed the hearts of God's people.
Romans 15:32
Then, if it is God's will, I can come to you full of joy and be refreshed by being with you.

Spiritual Principle

A humble, repentant church refreshes the hearts of God's servants.

Application

Do the people who serve you leave refreshed or worn down?

XIV. BOASTING PROVED TRUE

2 Corinthians 7:14 — Not Put to Shame

“For if I have boasted anything about you to him, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true.”
Before Titus went to Corinth, Paul had spoken well of the Corinthians.
He had told Titus that they would respond rightly.
“I was not put to shame.”
They did not let Paul down.
“Just as everything we said to you was true.”
Paul had always been truthful with them.

“So also our boasting before Titus has proved true.”
Paul's words about them were also true.
Paul believed the best about them even in a hard season.
And his hope was not disappointed.

Cross References

Romans 5:5
> This hope will never let us down, because God has poured His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit He gave us.

Proverbs 12:22
> The Lord hates lying lips, but He is pleased with people who are truthful.

Philippians 1:20
> I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will have courage, so that Christ will be honored by my life.

Spiritual Principle

Speak truthfully, and believe the best about God's people.

Key Truth

Love hopes for the best in others, even before it sees it.

XV. FEAR AND TREMBLING

2 Corinthians 7:15 — Titus' Growing Affection

“And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers how you all obeyed him, receiving him with fear and trembling.”
“His affection for you is even greater.”
Titus now loved the Corinthians more than before.
“As he remembers how you all obeyed him.”
They had listened to the message Titus brought.
They had followed through.
“Receiving him with fear and trembling.”
This does not mean they were terrified of Titus.
It means they received him with deep respect and seriousness.
They knew he came with a message from God's apostle.
They took God's word seriously.
The result was love.
Obedience did not create distance.
It created deeper affection.

Cross References

Philippians 2:12
> So, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, keep working out your salvation with deep respect and trembling before God.

Philippians 2:29
> Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and give honor to people like him.

Ephesians 6:5
Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and sincere hearts, just as you would obey Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Receiving God's word with reverence builds love between believers.

Application

How do you receive those who bring you God's word?

XVI. COMPLETE CONFIDENCE

2 Corinthians 7:16 — Paul's Joy

“I rejoice that I have complete confidence in you.”
The chapter ends with joy.
“I rejoice.”
The fear is gone.
The worry is gone.
The relationship is restored.
“I have complete confidence in you.”
This was quite a change.
The Corinthians had been divided and troubled.
But now Paul trusted them fully.
This verse also prepares for Chapters 8 and 9.
There Paul will ask them to give generously for the poor believers in Jerusalem.
His confidence in them gives him the freedom to ask.

Cross References

Philemon 1:21
I am writing because I am sure you will obey. I know you will do even more than I am asking.
2 Thessalonians 3:4
We trust the Lord that you are doing what we told you, and that you will keep doing it.
Galatians 5:10
I am confident in the Lord that you will not believe anything different. The one who is troubling you will face God's judgment, whoever he is.

Spiritual Principle

Repentance restores trust, and restored trust brings joy.

Key Truth

God can turn a broken relationship into a joyful one.

XVII. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 7

1. Holiness Is Active

“Let us cleanse ourselves from everything that defiles body and spirit.”

Principle:

Believers must continually cleanse themselves from both physical and spiritual defilement, walking in reverence toward God.

2. Ministry Requires Open Hearts

“Make room for us in your hearts.”

Principle:

Paul shows love, honesty, and confidence in the Corinthians, modeling Christlike care.

3. God Comforts the Discouraged

“But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the arrival of Titus.”

Principle:

Just as He encouraged Paul through Titus and the Corinthians, God strengthens His people through others.

4. True Repentance Flows from Godly Sorrow

“Godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.”

Principle:

Unlike worldly regret that destroys, godly sorrow produces lasting change and salvation.

5. Obedience Brings Unity and Joy

“I rejoice that I have complete confidence in you.”

Principle:

The Corinthians' repentance and obedience refreshed Titus and confirmed Paul's confidence in them.

XVIII. GODLY SORROW AND WORLDLY SORROW

Verse 10 gives one of the clearest contrasts in the Bible.

Godly Sorrow

- Grieves because sin offends God.
- Turns toward God.
- Leads to repentance.
- Brings forgiveness and salvation.
- Leaves no regret.
- Example: Peter, who wept and was restored.

Worldly Sorrow

- Grieves because of consequences.
- Turns inward.
- Leads to shame without change.
- Brings despair.
- Produces death.
- Example: Judas, who was sorry but did not return to Jesus.

Key Truth

The difference is not how much we hurt, but where our hurt takes us.

XIX. SEVEN MARKS OF TRUE REPENTANCE

Verse 11 shows what godly sorrow produced in Corinth.

1. Earnestness

Taking sin seriously.

2. Eagerness to Clear Themselves

Wanting to make things right.

3. Indignation

Being angry at the sin.

4. Fear

A fresh reverence for God.

5. Longing

A desire for restored fellowship.

6. Zeal

Energy to do what is right.

7. Readiness to See Justice Done

Willingness to deal with the wrong.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Real repentance does not stop at tears; it moves the heart, the mind, and the hands.

XX. HOW GOD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE

Verses 5–7 and 13 show how God brought comfort to Paul.

Through a Friend's Presence

“By the arrival of Titus.”

Through Good News

“He told us of your longing for me.”

Through Restored Relationships

“Your zeal for me.”

Through the Joy of Others

“We rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus.”

What This Means for Us

- God sees the downcast.
- God often answers through people.
- We can be the answer to someone else's prayer.
- Encouragement passes from one heart to another.

Key Truth

Sometimes the comfort God sends walks through the door with a familiar face.

XXI. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 7 TEACHES ABOUT GOD

He Keeps His Promises

“Since we have these promises.”

He Is Holy and Worthy of Reverence

“Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

He Comforts the Downcast

“But God, who comforts the downcast.”

He Works Through People

“Comforted us by the arrival of Titus.”

He Leads Sinners to Repentance

“You were grieved in a godly way.”

He Saves

“Repentance that leads to salvation.”

He Sees Our Hearts

“In the sight of God.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The holy God who calls us to clean lives is the same tender God who lifts us up when we are low.

XXII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What promises does Paul mean in verse 1?
The promises at the end of Chapter 6: God will live among His people, welcome them, and be their Father.

Question 2

What does it mean to cleanse ourselves from what defiles body and spirit?
To turn away from outward sins of the body and inward sins of the heart.

Question 3

Why did Paul ask the Corinthians to make room for him in their hearts?
Some had pulled away from him because of false teachers and criticism.
He wanted their love and trust restored.

Question 4

How could Paul overflow with joy in affliction?
His joy came from God's comfort and from the good news about the Corinthians, not from easy circumstances.

Question 5

What does verse 5 show us about Paul?
He was human.
He felt tired, troubled, and afraid.

Question 6

How did God comfort Paul?
Through the arrival of Titus and the good report Titus brought from Corinth.

Question 7

Why did Paul regret his letter for a while?
He feared it might hurt them too much or push them away.

Question 8

What is godly sorrow?
Sorrow over sin because it offends God, leading to repentance and a changed life.

Question 9

What is worldly sorrow?
Sorrow about consequences or shame that does not turn to God and leads to death.

Question 10

What did godly sorrow produce in the Corinthians?
Earnestness, eagerness to clear themselves, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, and readiness to see justice done.

Question 11

Why did Paul say he wrote the letter?
So the Corinthians could see their own devotion and faithfulness before God.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 7 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 7 should cause believers to live:

- Actively pursuing holiness.
- Keeping a clear conscience toward others.
- Keeping their hearts open to God's people.
- Being honest with God about their fears.
- Comforting others who are discouraged.
- Receiving correction humbly.
- Repenting with godly sorrow, not just regret.
- Bringing joy and refreshment to those who serve them.

XXIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 7 asks several important questions.

Am I Pursuing Holiness?

Or have I grown comfortable with sin?

Is My Heart Open?

Have I closed my heart to someone God wants me to love?

Am I Honest About My Struggles?

Do I bring my fears to God, or hide them?

Who Needs My Comfort?

Is there someone God wants me to visit, call, or encourage?

How Do I Respond to Correction?

Do I become defensive, or do I listen?

What Kind of Sorrow Do I Have?

When I sin, am I sorry because I got caught, or because I hurt God?

Does My Repentance Bear Fruit?

Is there real change in my life?

Do I Refresh Others?

Do God's servants leave my presence encouraged?

XXIV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Where Does Your Sorrow Lead?”

Everyone feels sorrow over sin at some point.
Judas felt it.
Peter felt it.
Both men failed Jesus on the same night.
Both men wept.
Both men were deeply sorry.
But their stories ended very differently.
Judas carried his guilt alone.

He turned away.
His sorrow led to death.
Peter carried his guilt back to Jesus.
He returned.
And Jesus restored him and gave him work to do.
The difference was not the size of their sin.
It was not the depth of their tears.
It was the direction of their sorrow.
This creates a powerful principle.
Sorrow that leads you away from God will destroy you.
Sorrow that leads you to God will heal you.

Principle:

Never let guilt drive you away from God; let it drive you to Him.

XXV. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 7 is a chapter of restoration.
It calls believers to holiness.
It shows a pastor's open heart.
It shows that even great servants of God feel fear.
It shows the God who comforts the downcast.
And it shows the difference between sorrow that kills and sorrow that saves.
Paul's painful letter did not destroy the church.
It helped heal it.
2 Corinthians 7 therefore reminds us:
Never treat God's promises as permission to sin.
Never close your heart to God's people.
Never think you are alone in your fear.
Never confuse regret with repentance.
Never let guilt keep you away from God.
The church does not need people who never fail.
It needs:
Believers who pursue holiness.
Hearts that stay open.
Friends who bring comfort.
And sinners who return to God with godly sorrow.
The same God still calls:
Tell people that God comforts the downcast.
Tell people that godly sorrow leads to salvation.
Tell people that no one ever regrets turning back to God.
Tell people that broken relationships can be restored.
And as you live:
Cleanse your life.
Open your heart.
Comfort the discouraged.
Return to God whenever you fall.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for Your promises to live among us and be our Father.
Thank You that You are the God who comforts the downcast.
Thank You for the people You send to encourage us when we are worn out and afraid.
Thank You that You do not leave us in our sin, but lead us to repentance.
Thank You that godly sorrow leads to salvation and leaves no regret.
Thank You that broken relationships can be healed by Your grace.
Forgive us when we have grown comfortable with sin.
Forgive us when we have closed our hearts to others.
Forgive us when we have been sorry only for the consequences of our sin.
Forgive us when we have run from You instead of to You.
Help us cleanse ourselves from everything that defiles body and spirit.
Help us grow in holiness with reverence for You.
Make us people who comfort others.
Give us humble hearts to receive correction.
Let our repentance bear real fruit.
And let our lives refresh and encourage those who serve You.
“For godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“For godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow produces death.” — 2 Corinthians 7:10

Central Truth

God calls His people to holiness, comforts the discouraged through one another, and uses godly sorrow to produce true repentance that leads to salvation, restored relationships, and lasting joy.

2 Corinthians 7 in One Sentence

Paul urges believers to cleanse themselves and perfect holiness, pleads for open hearts, tells how God comforted him through Titus and the good news from Corinth, and explains that godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, while worldly sorrow produces death.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 8 — Excelling in the Grace of Giving

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 8 turns to a very practical subject.
Money.
More specifically, giving.
Paul was gathering an offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem.
Many Jewish Christians there were suffering from poverty and hardship.
Paul asked the Gentile churches to help.
This offering mattered deeply to Paul.
It met real needs.
And it showed that Jewish and Gentile believers were one family in Christ.
The Corinthians had started well.
A year earlier, they had been eager to give.
But they had not finished.
Now that the relationship with Paul was restored, he gently encourages them to complete what they began.
He does not use pressure or guilt.
Instead, he gives them examples.
First, the churches of Macedonia, who were very poor, yet gave with overflowing joy.
Then, the greatest example of all:
“Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor.”
Paul also explains how the money will be handled.
He is sending Titus and two trusted brothers.
Everything will be done honestly, before God and before people.
The chapter moves through four movements:

- The Example of the Macedonian Churches (verses 1–5).
- Call to Excel in Giving (verses 6–9).
- The Call to Complete Their Commitment (verses 10–15).
- Titus and Trusted Brothers Sent (verses 16–24).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 8 is:
Generous giving is a grace from God, modeled by Christ who became poor for us, flowing from hearts first given to the Lord, completed in faithful action, handled with integrity, and offered as proof of genuine love.

I. THE GRACE OF GOD IN MACEDONIA

2 Corinthians 8:1 — Grace Given to the Churches

“Moreover, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.”
Paul begins with a report about other churches.
The churches of Macedonia included Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.
“The grace of God that has been given.”
Notice how Paul describes their generosity.
He does not first praise the Macedonians.
He praises God's grace.
Their giving was something God had done in them.
Generosity is not natural to the human heart.
It is a work of God's grace.

Cross References

Romans 15:26
The believers in Macedonia and Achaia were glad to collect a gift for the poor among God's people in Jerusalem.
1 Corinthians 16:1
Now about the money being collected for God's people: do the same thing I told the churches in Galatia to do.
Philippians 4:15
You Philippians know that when I first preached the gospel and then left Macedonia, you were the only church that shared with me in giving and receiving.

Spiritual Principle

Generosity is a fruit of God's grace working in the heart.

Application

Do you see your giving as something God's grace produces in you?

II. JOY AND POVERTY OVERFLOWING

2 Corinthians 8:2 — Rich Generosity

“In the midst of a severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.”
This verse describes a surprising combination.
“In the midst of a severe trial.”
The Macedonian believers were suffering.
They faced persecution and pressure.
“Their overflowing joy.”
Yet they were full of joy.
“And their extreme poverty.”

They were deeply poor.
The word Paul uses describes poverty that goes all the way down.
“Welled up in rich generosity.”
Trial, joy, and poverty mixed together and overflowed in giving.
Their wealth did not produce their generosity.
Their joy in Christ did.

Cross References

James 1:2
My brothers and sisters, whenever trials of every kind come your way, count it as pure joy.
Mark 12:44
The others gave out of what they had left over. But she, out of her poverty, gave everything she had to live on.
Revelation 2:9
I know your troubles and your poverty, but you are actually rich.

Spiritual Principle

Generosity flows from joy in Christ, not from the size of a bank account.

Key Truth

The poorest believers can be the richest givers.

III. BEYOND THEIR ABILITY

2 Corinthians 8:3 — Of Their Own Accord

“For I can testify that they gave according to their ability, and beyond their ability, entirely of their own accord.”
Paul was an eyewitness.
“They gave according to their ability.”
They gave what they could.
“And beyond their ability.”
Then they gave more than seemed possible.
They gave sacrificially.
“Entirely of their own accord.”
No one forced them.
No one pressured them.
They chose freely to give.
This is the heart of Christian giving.
It is not a tax.
It is a willing response to God.

Cross References

Exodus 35:29
All the Israelite men and women whose hearts moved them brought gifts to the Lord of their own free will for the work He had commanded through Moses.

1 Chronicles 29:9
The people were full of joy because their leaders had given so freely, and they had given to the Lord with all their hearts.
Mark 12:44
Everyone else gave from their extra, but she gave from what little she had. She put in all she had to live on.

Spiritual Principle

God loves giving that is free, willing, and sacrificial.

Application

Is your giving a choice of the heart, or a reluctant duty?

IV. BEGGING FOR THE PRIVILEGE

2 Corinthians 8:4 — Sharing in the Service

“They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.”
This is remarkable.
Paul did not have to plead with the Macedonians.
They pleaded with Paul.
“Urgently pleaded with us.”
They begged to be included.
Perhaps Paul hesitated to take money from people so poor.
But they insisted.
“For the privilege of sharing.”
They saw giving as a privilege, not a burden.
“In this service to the saints.”
“Saints” means God's holy people.
Here it refers to the poor believers in Jerusalem.
Giving was a way to serve fellow believers they had never met.

Cross References

Romans 15:25
Right now I am on my way to Jerusalem to serve God's people there.
Acts 11:29
The disciples decided that each of them would send help to the believers in Judea, as much as each one was able.
1 Corinthians 16:1
About the collection for God's people, follow the same plan I gave the churches in Galatia.

Spiritual Principle

Giving to God's people is a privilege to pursue, not a burden to avoid.

Key Truth

The Macedonians did not ask, “Do we have to?” They asked, “May we?”

V. FIRST TO THE LORD

2 Corinthians 8:5 — They Gave Themselves

“And they went beyond our expectations: first they gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us, by the will of God.”
Here is the secret of the Macedonians' generosity.
“They went beyond our expectations.”
Paul expected a small gift, if any.
They gave far more.
“First they gave themselves to the Lord.”
Before they gave money, they gave themselves.
They surrendered their lives to Christ.
Once God has the person, He has everything the person owns.
“And then to us, by the will of God.”
They also gave themselves to Paul and his ministry.
This was God's will working in them.

Cross References

Romans 12:1
> Brothers and sisters, God has shown you great mercy. So give your whole selves to Him as a living offering, set apart and pleasing to Him. This is the worship that makes sense.

Galatians 2:20
> My old self died with Christ on the cross. Now it is not really me living, but Christ living in me. I live my life here by trusting in God's Son, who loved me and gave His life for me.

2 Corinthians 5:15
> Christ died for everyone, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again.

Spiritual Principle

The first gift God wants is not our money, but ourselves.

Application

Have you given yourself fully to the Lord?

VI. FINISH WHAT WAS BEGUN

2 Corinthians 8:6 — Titus Sent to Complete It

“So we urged Titus, that just as he had begun, he should also complete this act of grace among you.”
Titus had already started the collection in Corinth.
Now Paul asks him to go back and help them finish it.
“This act of grace.”
Again, giving is called a **grace**.
It is a gift God works in us.

And it is a gift we give to others.
Paul did not want the Corinthians' good start to fade away.

Cross References

Titus 1:5
I left you in Crete so you could finish putting in order what was still undone.
Philippians 1:6
I am sure of this: God, who started a good work in you, will keep working until it is finished on the day Christ Jesus returns.
Galatians 6:9
Keep on doing good and do not get worn out. When the time comes, we will bring in a harvest if we keep going.

Spiritual Principle

A good start must be followed by faithful completion.

Application

What good work have you started that God wants you to finish?

VII. EXCEL IN THIS GRACE ALSO

2 Corinthians 8:7 — Abounding in Giving

“But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in the love we inspired in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”
Paul begins with genuine praise.
The Corinthians were richly gifted.

- Faith.
- Speech.
- Knowledge.
- Diligence.
- Love.

They were proud of their spiritual gifts.
“See that you also excel in this grace of giving.”
Paul places giving right next to faith and knowledge.
It belongs on the same list.
A church can be strong in teaching and still weak in generosity.
Paul wanted them to be complete.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:5
Through Christ you have been made rich in every way, in all your speaking and in all your knowledge.
1 Corinthians 12:31
Eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the very best way of all.

1 Peter 4:10
Each of you has received a gift from God. Use it to serve others as good managers of God's grace in its many forms.

Spiritual Principle

Generosity is a spiritual grace just as important as faith, knowledge, and speech.

Key Truth

Spiritual maturity includes an open hand.

VIII. TESTING THE SINCERITY OF LOVE

2 Corinthians 8:8 — Not a Command

“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.”
“I am not commanding you.”
Paul could have used his authority.
But forced giving is not true giving.
“I want to test the sincerity of your love.”
Love is easy to talk about.
Giving shows whether it is real.
“By comparing it with the earnestness of others.”
The Macedonians had shown their love.
Paul wanted the Corinthians to show theirs too.
This was not to shame them.
It was to encourage them.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 7:6
I am saying this as permission, not as a command.
James 1:3
You know that when your faith is tested, it produces endurance.
1 Peter 1:7
These trials come so that your faith, which is worth far more than gold, can be proven real and bring praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Spiritual Principle

Giving is one of the ways genuine love is proven.

Application

What does your giving reveal about your love?

IX. THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

2 Corinthians 8:9 — Rich, Yet Poor for Us

“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.”
This is the heart of the chapter.
Paul points to the greatest Giver of all.
“Though He was rich.”
Before He came to earth, Christ shared the glory of heaven.
He owned everything.
“Yet for your sake He became poor.”
He left heaven's glory.
He was born in a stable.
He had no place of His own to lay His head.
He died on a cross.
“So that you through His poverty might become rich.”
Our riches are not mainly money.
They are forgiveness, eternal life, adoption into God's family, and every spiritual blessing.
Christian giving begins here.
We give because Christ first gave Himself for us.

Cross References

Philippians 2:6
Though Christ was God by nature, He did not think being equal with God was something to hold on to for His own advantage.
Philippians 2:7
Instead, He gave up everything and took the role of a servant, becoming a human being.
Luke 9:58
Jesus answered, “Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest His head.”

Spiritual Principle

Christ became poor to make us rich; His giving is the pattern for ours.

Key Truth

The cross is the greatest motive for generosity.

X. FINISH WHAT YOU STARTED

2 Corinthians 8:10 — Paul's Advice

“And in this matter I give my advice: it is to your advantage to finish what you started a year ago —not only to desire to do it but also to complete it.”

“I give my advice.”
Again Paul gives counsel, not a command.
“It is to your advantage.”
Finishing would be good for them.
“To finish what you started a year ago.”
The Corinthians had been first to want to give.
But a year had passed, and the work was not done.
“Not only to desire to do it but also to complete it.”
Good intentions are not enough.
Desire must turn into action.

Cross References

Philippians 1:6
I am confident that God, who began His good work in you, will carry it through to the end.
Ecclesiastes 5:4
When you make a promise to God, do not be slow to keep it. God takes no pleasure in fools. Do what you promised.
Galatians 6:9
Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, because in time we will reap a harvest if we do not quit.

Spiritual Principle

Good intentions honor God only when they are carried through.

Application

Is there a promise you made to God that you have not kept?

XI. MATCH YOUR EAGERNESS

2 Corinthians 8:11 — According to Your Ability

“Now therefore complete the work, so that your eagerness may be matched by your completion, according to your ability.”
“Now therefore complete the work.”
It was time to act.
“So that your eagerness may be matched by your completion.”
Their eagerness had been real.
Now their actions needed to match it.
“According to your ability.”
Paul was not asking them to give what they did not have.
He asked them to give in proportion to what God had given them.

Cross References

Philippians 1:6
God started a good work in you, and I am sure He will bring it to completion.

Luke 14:28
Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and figure the cost, to see if you have enough to finish it?
James 1:4
Let endurance finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Spiritual Principle

Let your actions catch up with your good desires.

Key Truth

God measures giving by what we have, not by what others have.

XII. A WILLING HEART

2 Corinthians 8:12 — What One Has

“For if there is a willing heart, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.”
This verse brings great freedom.
“If there is a willing heart.”
God looks first at the heart.
“The gift is acceptable according to what one has.”
God accepts a gift based on what the giver actually has.
“Not according to what one does not have.”
God does not expect us to give what we do not possess.
A small gift from a willing heart pleases God.
A large gift from an unwilling heart does not impress Him.

Cross References

Mark 12:44
The rich gave out of their extra money, but this poor widow gave everything she had.
Exodus 25:2
Tell the Israelites to bring Me an offering. Receive it from everyone whose heart makes them want to give.
1 Chronicles 29:17
My God, I know that You test the heart and are pleased with honesty. I have given all these things willingly and with an honest heart.

Spiritual Principle

God values the willingness of the heart more than the size of the gift.

Application

Are you holding back because you think your gift is too small?

XIII. NOT A BURDEN ON YOU

2 Corinthians 8:13 — Fairness

“For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened,”
Paul wants to be clear.
He was not asking the Corinthians to become poor so others could be comfortable.
Christian giving is not meant to crush the giver.
It is meant to share the load fairly.

Cross References

Galatians 6:2
When someone is weighed down, help carry the load. That is how you keep Christ's command.
Acts 4:34
No one among them was in need, because those who owned land or houses sold them and brought the money.
Acts 2:45
They sold their property and belongings and gave to anyone who had a need.

Spiritual Principle

Christian giving is about sharing burdens, not shifting them.

Key Truth

God's family carries its loads together.

XIV. THERE MAY BE EQUALITY

2 Corinthians 8:14 — Abundance and Need

“but that there may be equality: your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may also supply your need, that there may be equality.”
“That there may be equality.”
Paul means fairness and balance.
He is not describing a forced system.
He is describing believers caring for one another freely.
“Your abundance at the present time should supply their need.”
Right now the Corinthians had more.
Jerusalem had less.
“So that their abundance may also supply your need.”
Times can change.
One day the Corinthians might be in need.
Then others could help them.
Some also see a spiritual side to this.
The gospel came to the Gentiles from Jerusalem.
The Gentiles could now share material blessings in return.

Cross References

Acts 2:44
All the believers were together and shared everything they had.
Acts 4:34
There were no needy people among them, because those who had property sold it and brought the money.
Acts 4:35
They placed the money at the apostles' feet, and it was given to each person as they had need.

Spiritual Principle

In God's family, those who have more help those who have less.

Application

Where has God given you more than you need, so you can help someone else?

XV. NOT TOO MUCH, NOT TOO LITTLE

2 Corinthians 8:15 — The Lesson of the Manna

“As it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.””
Paul quotes Exodus 16.
In the wilderness, God fed Israel with manna.
Some gathered more, and some gathered less.
But when it was measured, everyone had exactly what they needed.
No one could hoard it.
Extra manna spoiled overnight.
God's provision was meant to be shared, not stored up selfishly.
Paul applies this to the church.
God provides enough for His people when they share.

Cross References

Exodus 16:18
When they measured it, those who had gathered a lot did not have too much, and those who gathered a little did not have too little. Each one had just what they needed.
Exodus 16:17
The Israelites did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, and some gathered only a little.
Proverbs 30:8
Keep lies far away from me. Do not make me poor or rich. Just give me the food I need each day.

Spiritual Principle

God provides enough for all when His people share what He gives.

Key Truth

What we hold on to selfishly, we lose; what we share, God multiplies.

XVI. THANKS BE TO GOD FOR TITUS

2 Corinthians 8:16 — Earnest Care

“But thanks be to God, who put the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.”
Paul now turns to the men he is sending.
“Thanks be to God.”
Paul gives God the credit.
“Who put the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.”
Titus cared for the Corinthians just as Paul did.
God had placed that love in his heart.
Every good desire for others comes from God.

Cross References

Proverbs 21:1
The king's heart is in the Lord's hand like streams of water. He turns it wherever He wants.
James 1:17
Everything good that we receive, every perfect gift, comes down from God above. He made the lights in the sky, and He does not change the way shadows do.
2 Corinthians 7:6
But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us when Titus arrived.

Spiritual Principle

God puts genuine care for His people into the hearts of His servants.

Application

Thank God for the people He has given a heart to care for you.

XVII. EAGER TO GO

2 Corinthians 8:17 — Of His Own Accord

“For he not only accepted our appeal, but being very eager, he went to you of his own accord.”
“He not only accepted our appeal.”
Paul asked Titus to go.
“But being very eager, he went to you of his own accord.”
Titus did not need to be pushed.
He wanted to go.
Titus served willingly, just as the Macedonians gave willingly.

Cross References

1 Peter 5:2
Take care of God's flock that is under your care. Watch over them willingly, as God wants, not because you must and not for money, but because you are eager to serve.

Philemon 1:14

I did not want to do anything without your agreement, so that your kindness would come from your own choice and not from pressure.

Psalm 110:3

Your people will gladly offer themselves on the day You lead Your army.

Spiritual Principle

The best service flows from a willing and eager heart.

Application

Do you serve God eagerly, or only when you are pushed?

XVIII. A BROTHER PRAISED BY ALL

2 Corinthians 8:18 — Service in the Gospel

“Along with him we are sending the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service in the gospel.”
Paul is sending a second man with Titus.
He does not name him.
Bible students have suggested several names, such as Luke or Barnabas.
But no one knows for sure.
What matters is his character.
“Praised by all the churches.”
He had a good reputation everywhere.
“For his service in the gospel.”
He was known for faithfully serving the gospel.

Cross References

Acts 15:22

The apostles and elders, together with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

Philippians 2:22

You know that Timothy has proven himself. Like a son working with his father, he has served with me in spreading the gospel.

3 John 1:12

Everyone speaks well of Demetrius, and the truth itself agrees. We speak well of him too, and you know we tell the truth.

Spiritual Principle

A good reputation earned through faithful service is valuable in God's work.

Key Truth

God's work needs people whom others can trust.

XIX. CHOSEN BY THE CHURCHES

2 Corinthians 8:19 — For the Glory of the Lord

“And not only that, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us in this act of grace, which we administer for the glory of the Lord Himself and to show our willingness.”
“He was chosen by the churches.”
This brother was not just Paul's choice.
The churches themselves appointed him.
This added accountability.
“To accompany us in this act of grace.”
He would travel with the offering.
“For the glory of the Lord Himself.”
The goal was not Paul's glory.
It was God's glory.
“And to show our willingness.”
It showed Paul's eagerness to help the poor.

Cross References

Acts 20:4
Several men went with Paul, including Sopater from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia.
1 Corinthians 10:31
Whatever you are doing, even eating a meal or having a drink, do it in a way that honors God.
Acts 6:3
Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are respected and full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this work.

Spiritual Principle

God's work should be done for His glory, with the church's trust and involvement.

Application

Who gets the glory for the good you do?

XX. AVOIDING BLAME

2 Corinthians 8:20 — A Wise Precaution

“We take this precaution so that no one should blame us for how we handle this generous gift.”
This was a large amount of money.
Paul knew people could make accusations.
Some in Corinth had already questioned his motives.
So he took careful steps.
Several trusted men would handle the money together.
No one could say Paul kept it for himself.
Paul did not just avoid wrongdoing.

He avoided giving anyone a reason to suspect wrongdoing.

Cross References

Romans 14:16
Do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.
1 Thessalonians 5:22
Stay away from every kind of evil.
Titus 2:8
Speak in a sound way that no one can criticize, so that those who oppose you will be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

Spiritual Principle

Handling money in God's work requires safeguards and transparency.

Key Truth

Integrity guards not only our hearts but also our reputation.

XXI. RIGHT BEFORE GOD AND PEOPLE

2 Corinthians 8:21 — Doing What Is Right

“For we are careful to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of people.”
“We are careful to do what is right.”
Paul thought carefully about how to act.
“Not only in the eyes of the Lord.”
First, God sees everything.
Paul wanted to be right before Him.
“But also in the eyes of people.”
Paul also wanted his actions to look right to others.
The gospel's reputation was at stake.
A clear conscience before God is essential.
But a clear testimony before people matters too.

Cross References

Proverbs 3:4
Then you will win favor and a good name with God and with people.
Romans 12:17
Do not pay anyone back with evil for evil. Be careful to do what everyone sees as right.
1 Peter 2:12
Live such good lives among unbelievers that, even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your good works and give glory to God when He comes.

Spiritual Principle

Believers should be honest before God and visibly honest before people.

Application

Would your handling of money stand up if everyone could see it?

XXII. A TESTED AND DILIGENT BROTHER

2 Corinthians 8:22 — Proven Many Times

“And we are sending with them another brother whom we have often tested and found diligent in many matters, but who is now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you.”
Paul sends a third man.
Again, he is not named.
“Whom we have often tested.”
He had proven himself many times.
“And found diligent in many matters.”
He was hardworking and faithful.
“Now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you.”
He believed in the Corinthians.
That made him even more eager to go.

Cross References

1 Timothy 3:10
They must first be tested. Then, if no one can find fault with them, let them serve as deacons.
Philippians 2:22
You know how Timothy has proved himself, serving with me in the gospel like a son with his father.
Romans 16:1
I am recommending to you our sister Phoebe, who serves the church in Cenchreae.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful people are proven over time.

Key Truth

Trust is built one faithful act at a time.

XXIII. THE GLORY OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 8:23 — Partners and Messengers

“As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.”
Paul gives credentials for each man.
“Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker.”
Titus worked side by side with Paul.
“Our brothers, they are messengers of the churches.”
The word **“messengers”** is related to the word for apostles.
Here it means men sent on a mission by the churches.

“The glory of Christ.”
What a description.
Their faithful lives brought honor to Christ.

Cross References

Philemon 1:17
So if you think of me as your partner, welcome him the way you would welcome me.
Philippians 2:25
I think I need to send Epaphroditus back to you. He is my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, and the messenger you sent to take care of my needs.
Philippians 1:11
I pray that your lives will be filled with the good fruit of right living that comes through Jesus Christ, to bring glory and praise to God.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful servants of the church bring glory to Christ.

Application

Does your life bring honor to Christ?

XXIV. SHOW THE PROOF OF YOUR LOVE

2 Corinthians 8:24 — Before the Churches

“Therefore, show them proof of your love and the reason for our boasting about you, so that the churches may see it.”
Paul ends with a final appeal.
“Show them proof of your love.”
Love must be shown, not just felt.
“And the reason for our boasting about you.”
Paul had spoken well of them.
Now they could prove him right.
“So that the churches may see it.”
Their generosity would be a testimony to other churches.
Love that acts encourages the whole body of Christ.

Cross References

1 John 3:18
My dear children, our love should not be just something we say. It should be real and shown by what we do.
Philippians 1:11
May your lives be full of the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, for God's glory and praise.
James 2:18
Someone might say, “One person has faith, and another does good works.” But you cannot prove faith that does nothing. I will prove my faith by the things I do.

Spiritual Principle

Genuine love proves itself in action.

Key Truth

Love that never acts is not yet complete.

XXV. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 8

1. Giving Is a Grace

“See that you also excel in this grace of giving.”

Principle:

Like faith, knowledge, and love, generosity is a gift from God to be used faithfully.

2. True Generosity Is Not Based on Wealth

“Their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.”

Principle:

The Macedonians gave joyfully out of deep poverty, proving that God looks at the heart, not the amount.

3. Christ Is the Model of Giving

“Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor.”

Principle:

He became poor so that we might become rich through His sacrifice.

4. Promises Must Be Completed

“Not only to desire to do it but also to complete it.”

Principle:

Desire alone is not enough; obedience follows through in action.

5. Stewardship Requires Accountability

“We are careful to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of people.”

Principle:

Paul stressed honesty, openness, and integrity in handling offerings.

6. Love Is Proven in Action

“Show them proof of your love.”

Principle:

Generosity is a visible demonstration of genuine Christian love.

XXVI. THE MARKS OF GRACE-FILLED GIVING

Verses 1–5 show what the Macedonians' giving looked like.

It Was Joyful

“Their overflowing joy.”

It Was Sacrificial

“Beyond their ability.”

It Was Willing

“Entirely of their own accord.”

It Was Eager

“They urgently pleaded with us.”

It Was Seen as a Privilege

“The privilege of sharing.”

It Began with Surrender

“First they gave themselves to the Lord.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When God has the heart, the wallet follows.

XXVII. THE GREATEST GIFT

Verse 9 shows the generosity of Christ.

What Christ Had

- The glory of heaven.
- Equality with God.
- The worship of angels.
- Ownership of all things.

What Christ Became

- A baby in a manger.
- A man with no home of His own.
- A servant.
- A sacrifice on the cross.

What We Receive

- Forgiveness of sins.
- Eternal life.
- A place in God's family.
- Every spiritual blessing.

Key Truth

We never give to God more than He has already given to us.

XXVIII. HANDLING GOD'S MONEY WITH INTEGRITY

Verses 16–24 show how Paul protected the offering.

Trusted People

Titus and two proven brothers.

Shared Responsibility

More than one person handled the money.

Church Involvement

One brother was chosen by the churches.

Avoiding Suspicion

“So that no one should blame us.”

Openness Before God and People

“Not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of people.”

What This Means for Churches Today

- Choose trustworthy people to handle money.
- Never leave one person alone with the funds.
- Keep clear and honest records.
- Be open with the congregation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful giving deserves faithful handling.

XXIX. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 8 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

He Is Full of Grace

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

He Was Rich

“Though He was rich.”

He Became Poor

“Yet for your sake He became poor.”

He Did It for Us

“For your sake.”

He Makes Us Rich

“So that you through His poverty might become rich.”

He Is Glorified in His Servants

“The glory of Christ.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jesus gave up the riches of heaven so that we could share the riches of God's grace forever.

XXX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What was the offering Paul was collecting?
An offering from Gentile churches for the poor believers in Jerusalem.

Question 2

Why does Paul call giving a “grace”?
Because generosity is something God works in the heart, and it is a gift we share with others.

Question 3

What was surprising about the Macedonians' giving?
They were very poor and suffering, yet they gave with overflowing joy and beyond their ability.

Question 4

What was the secret of the Macedonians' generosity?
They first gave themselves to the Lord.

Question 5

Why did Paul not command the Corinthians to give?
True giving must be willing.
He wanted their giving to show the sincerity of their love.

Question 6

How is Christ the greatest example of giving?
Though He was rich, He became poor for us, so that we could become rich through Him.

Question 7

What problem did the Corinthians have?
They had started eagerly a year earlier but had not finished.

Question 8

How does God measure a gift?
By the willing heart and by what a person has, not by what they do not have.

Question 9

What does Paul mean by “equality”?
Fairness and balance, where those with more help those with less, and the help can flow both ways over time.

Question 10

What lesson does the manna teach?
God provides enough for everyone, and His gifts are meant to be shared, not hoarded.

Question 11

Why did Paul send several men with the offering?
To make sure the money was handled honestly and that no one could accuse him of wrongdoing.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 8 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 8 should cause believers to live:

- Giving themselves first to the Lord.

- Seeing generosity as a grace from God.
- Giving joyfully and willingly.
- Giving even in hard times.
- Remembering Christ's gift to them.
- Following through on their promises.
- Handling money with honesty and openness.
- Proving their love by their actions.

XXXI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 8 asks several important questions.

Have I Given Myself to the Lord?

Or am I trying to give Him things without giving Him me?

Do I See Giving as a Privilege?

Or as a burden?

Do I Give Joyfully?

Or reluctantly?

Do I Give Only When It Is Easy?

Or am I willing to give sacrificially?

Do I Remember What Christ Gave for Me?

Does His gift shape my generosity?

Have I Finished What I Promised?

Is there a commitment I need to complete?

Am I Honest with Money?

Would my handling of money stand the light of day?

Does My Love Show?

Can others see my love in what I do?

XXXII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“First They Gave Themselves”

Many people think giving starts with money.
It does not.
The Macedonians were poor.
They were suffering.
They had every reason to hold back.
But they begged to give.
Why?
Because something had happened before they ever opened their hands.
They had given themselves to the Lord.
When a person belongs to God, everything they have belongs to God too.
Their time.
Their talents.
Their money.
Giving is no longer a battle.
It becomes a joy.
This creates a powerful principle.
God does not first want what is in your hand.
He wants your heart.
When He has your heart, your hand will open.

Principle:

Give yourself to God first, and generous giving will follow.

XXXIII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 8 teaches believers how to give.
It shows poor churches giving with rich joy.
It shows that giving is a grace.
It points to Christ, who became poor for us.
It calls us to finish what we start.
It teaches that God looks at a willing heart.
And it shows how to handle money with integrity.
2 Corinthians 8 therefore reminds us:
Never think you are too poor to give.
Never give only out of pressure.
Never forget what Christ gave for you.
Never leave good intentions unfinished.
Never handle God's money carelessly.
The church does not need people who only talk about love.
It needs:
Believers who give themselves to God.

Givers who give with joy.
Servants who finish what they start.
And stewards who handle money with honesty.
The same Savior still calls:
Tell people that Christ became poor to make them rich.
Tell people that God accepts a willing heart.
Tell people that giving is a privilege.
Tell people that God provides enough when His people share.
And as you live:
Give yourself to God.
Give with joy.
Finish what you start.
Prove your love in action.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Thank You that though He was rich, for our sake He became poor.
Thank You that through His poverty we have become rich.
Thank You for the example of believers who gave with joy even in deep poverty.
Thank You that You look at a willing heart and not the size of the gift.
Thank You for faithful servants who handle Your work with honesty.
Forgive us when we have held on too tightly to what You have given us.
Forgive us when we have given grudgingly or not at all.
Forgive us when we have started good things and not finished them.
Forgive us when our love has been only words.
Help us give ourselves to You first.
Make us generous and joyful givers.
Help us see giving as a privilege.
Help us finish what we have promised.
Keep us honest in everything we do with money.
And let our love be seen in our actions, for the glory of Christ.
“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.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“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.” — 2 Corinthians 8:9

Central Truth

Generous giving is a grace from God, modeled by Christ who became poor for us, flowing from hearts first given to the Lord, completed in faithful action, handled with integrity, and offered as proof of genuine love.

2 Corinthians 8 in One Sentence

Paul encourages the Corinthians to excel in the grace of giving by pointing to the joyful generosity of the poor Macedonian churches and to Christ who became poor to make us rich, urging them to finish what they began according to their ability, and sending trusted men so that the gift would be handled with integrity as proof of their love.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 9 — The Cheerful Giver

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 9 continues the subject of Chapter 8.
Paul is still speaking about the offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem.
The Corinthians had promised to give.
A year earlier, they had been eager.
Paul had even boasted about them to the churches in Macedonia.
Their zeal had stirred others to give.
But now Paul wants to be sure their gift is ready.
So he sends brothers ahead to help them prepare.
He does not want the offering to be rushed or pressured.
He wants it to be a gift of generosity, not grudging obligation.
Then Paul teaches a beautiful principle.
“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”
Giving is like planting seed.
God is the One who gives the seed, grows the harvest, and supplies everything we need.

Then comes one of the best-known verses on giving in the Bible.
“God loves a cheerful giver.”
Paul ends by showing where generosity leads.
Needs are met.
Thanks rise to God.
Believers in different places are joined together in love and prayer.
And every gift points back to the greatest gift of all.
“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”
The chapter moves through three movements:

- Preparing the Offering in Advance (verses 1–5).
- The Principle of Sowing and Reaping (verses 6–9).
- God Supplies and Multiplies the Harvest (verses 10–15).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 9 is:
God loves a cheerful giver, supplies everything His people need to be generous, multiplies what they sow for His glory, and uses their giving to meet needs, unite believers, and fill the world with thanksgiving for His indescribable gift.

I. THE MINISTRY TO THE SAINTS

2 Corinthians 9:1 — No Need to Write

“As for the ministry to the saints, it is unnecessary for me to write to you.”
Paul has just spent a whole chapter on giving.
Now he says it is unnecessary to write about it.
Why?
Because the Corinthians already knew about the offering.
They had already agreed to help.
Paul was being gracious.
He was not lecturing them as if they knew nothing.
“The ministry to the saints.”
Giving is called a **ministry**.
It is a way of serving God's people.
The **saints** here are the poor believers in Jerusalem.

Cross References

Romans 15:25
But right now I am going to Jerusalem to help God's people there.
1 Corinthians 16:1
About the gift you are collecting for God's people: do what I told the churches in Galatia to do.
Acts 11:29
The followers of Jesus each decided to send what they could to help the believers living in Judea.

Spiritual Principle

Giving to meet the needs of God's people is a true ministry.

Application

Do you see your giving as a way of serving God's people?

II. ZEAL THAT STIRS OTHERS

2 Corinthians 9:2 — Achaia Was Ready

“For I know your eagerness to help, and I boast about you to the Macedonians, saying that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up most of them.”
“I know your eagerness to help.”
Paul knew their hearts were willing.
“I boast about you to the Macedonians.”
Paul had told the Macedonians how eager the Corinthians were.
Achaia was the region where Corinth was located.
“Your zeal has stirred up most of them.”
The Corinthians' eagerness had inspired others.
Notice the interesting picture.
In Chapter 8, Paul used the Macedonians to encourage the Corinthians.
Here, he says the Corinthians had first encouraged the Macedonians.
Each church inspired the other.
That is how God's people should work together.

Cross References

Romans 15:26
The churches in Macedonia and Achaia were happy to give an offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem.
2 Corinthians 8:10
It is best for you to finish what you began last year, because you were the first both to give and to want to give.
Proverbs 27:17
Just as one piece of iron sharpens another, one friend helps make another better.

Spiritual Principle

One believer's eager heart can stir many others to serve.

Key Truth

Your example of generosity may encourage people you never meet.

III. READY, JUST AS I SAID

2 Corinthians 9:3 — Boasting Not Empty

“Yet I have sent the brothers so that our boasting about you in this matter may not prove empty, but that you may be ready, just as I said.”
“I have sent the brothers.”
These are Titus and the two brothers from Chapter 8.
“So that our boasting about you in this matter may not prove empty.”
Paul had spoken highly of them.
He did not want his words to turn out to be hollow.

“But that you may be ready, just as I said.”
Paul wanted them prepared.
He believed in them.
But he also knew that good intentions can slip away.
So he sent help to make sure they followed through.

Cross References

Philippians 2:16
Hold on firmly to the message of life. Then I can be proud on the day Christ returns that my work and effort were not wasted.
Galatians 2:2
I explained in private the gospel I preach to the Gentiles, to make sure that my work, past and present, was not for nothing.
1 Thessalonians 3:5
When I could not wait any longer, I sent Timothy to find out about your faith. I was afraid the tempter had tested you and all our work had been for nothing.

Spiritual Principle

Good intentions need practical help to become finished work.

Application

Who could help you follow through on what you promised God?

IV. AVOIDING SHAME

2 Corinthians 9:4 — If You Are Unprepared

“For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to mention you—would be ashamed of having been so confident.”
Paul imagines a possible problem.
He might bring Macedonian believers with him to Corinth.
What if the Corinthians were not ready?
“We—not to mention you—would be ashamed.”
Paul would be embarrassed.
The Corinthians would be embarrassed even more.
Paul says this gently.
He is not threatening them.
He is helping them see why preparation matters.

Cross References

Luke 14:28
If you want to build a tower, you first sit down and figure out how much it will cost, to see whether you have enough to finish it.
Luke 14:29
Otherwise, you might lay the foundation and not be able to finish, and everyone who sees it will laugh at you.

1 John 2:28
Dear children, stay close to Christ. Then when He comes, we will be confident and not ashamed to stand before Him.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful preparation keeps our promises from becoming a source of shame.

Key Truth

What we promise publicly, we should be ready to complete.

V. GENEROSITY, NOT OBLIGATION

2 Corinthians 9:5 — Arranged in Advance

“Therefore I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go ahead to you and arrange in advance the generous gift you promised, so that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as grudging obligation.”
“Go ahead to you and arrange in advance.”
Paul wanted the gift gathered before he arrived.
He did not want a last-minute collection.
A rushed collection could feel like pressure.
“The generous gift you promised.”
The Corinthians had made a promise.
“As a matter of generosity and not as grudging obligation.”
This is the key.
Paul did not want them to give because they were cornered.
He wanted the gift to come from a generous heart.
The word for **grudging obligation** carries the idea of something squeezed out of someone.
God does not want gifts that are squeezed out.

Cross References

Exodus 25:2
Tell the people of Israel to bring Me an offering. Accept it from each person whose heart moves them to give.
Deuteronomy 16:17
Every one of you must bring a gift as you are able, matching the blessing the Lord your God has given you.
1 Chronicles 29:5
Now, who will gladly give himself to the Lord today?

Spiritual Principle

Planned giving protects the heart from pressure and makes room for generosity.

Application

Do you plan your giving, or give only when pressured?

VI. SOWING AND REAPING

2 Corinthians 9:6 — Sparingly or Bountifully

“But this I say: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”
Paul uses a picture every farmer understands.
A farmer who plants a few seeds gets a small harvest.
A farmer who plants many seeds gets a large harvest.
“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.”
Holding back leads to a small harvest.
“Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”
Generous sowing leads to a generous harvest.
What does the harvest include?
The rest of the chapter answers.
God supplies what we need.
He enlarges the harvest of righteousness.
He produces thanksgiving and praise.
Bible teachers warn against turning this verse into a promise that giving will always make us wealthy.
The harvest God gives may be material, spiritual, or eternal.
The point is that God never lets generous giving go to waste.

Cross References

Proverbs 11:24
> One person gives freely and still gets richer. Another holds back what he should give and ends up poor.

Proverbs 22:9
> A generous person will be blessed, because he shares his food with the poor.

Galatians 6:9
> Do not grow tired of doing good. If we keep at it, we will gather a harvest when the time is right.

Spiritual Principle

God never wastes what is sown generously for Him.

Key Truth

The harvest belongs to God, but the sowing is up to us.

VII. THE CHEERFUL GIVER

2 Corinthians 9:7 — God Loves a Cheerful Giver

“Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”
This is one of the most loved verses about giving.
“Each person.”
Giving is personal.

Every believer is included.
“Should give what he has decided in his heart to give.”
Giving should be thought through.
It is decided ahead of time, before God.
It comes from the heart.
“Not reluctantly.”
Not with sadness, as if losing something.
“Or under compulsion.”
Not because of pressure or guilt.
“For God loves a cheerful giver.”
The word **cheerful** describes glad, joyful giving.
God does not need our money.
He looks for a joyful heart.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 15:10
> Give to the poor freely and do not feel bad about it. Because of this, the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you do.

1 Chronicles 29:9
> The people celebrated because their leaders gave so willingly, giving to the Lord with their whole hearts.

Romans 12:8
> If your gift is to encourage others, encourage them. If it is giving, give generously. If it is leading, lead with care. If it is showing mercy, do it gladly.

Spiritual Principle

God delights in giving that is planned in the heart and offered with joy.

Application

When you give, do you give gladly?

VIII. ALL GRACE OVERFLOWING

2 Corinthians 9:8 — Abounding in Every Good Work

“And God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”
Look at how many times Paul uses the word **all**.

- All grace.
- All things.
- All times.
- All that you need.
- Every good work.

“God is able.”
Generosity rests on God's power, not ours.
“To make all grace overflow to you.”
God's grace is not small.

It overflows.
“Having all that you need.”
God promises to supply what we need, not everything we want.
“You will abound in every good work.”
God supplies us so that we can keep doing good.
His blessings flow to us so they can flow through us.

Cross References

Philippians 4:19
My God will give you everything you need from His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
Ephesians 3:20
God can do far more than anything we ask or even imagine, by His power that is at work in us.
2 Peter 1:3
By His divine power, God has given us everything we need to live a godly life, through knowing Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.

Spiritual Principle

God gives us enough so that we can keep giving.

Key Truth

We are not reservoirs that store up blessings, but channels that pass them on.

IX. RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT ENDURES

2 Corinthians 9:9 — Given to the Poor

“As it is written: “He has scattered abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.””
Paul quotes Psalm 112.
That psalm describes the person who fears the Lord.
“He has scattered abroad.”
Like a farmer scattering seed, the godly person spreads his gifts widely.
“He has given to the poor.”
His generosity reaches people in need.
“His righteousness endures forever.”
Money spent on ourselves is soon gone.
But righteous acts of generosity have lasting value before God.

Cross References

Psalm 112:9
He gives freely to the poor. His right living will last forever, and he will be honored.
Psalm 112:3
His house will have plenty, and his right living will never be forgotten.
Proverbs 19:17
When you are kind to the poor, it is like lending to the Lord, and He will pay you back for what you did.

Spiritual Principle

Generosity to the poor has lasting value in God's eyes.

Application

Who in need could you help this week?

X. SEED FOR THE SOWER

2 Corinthians 9:10 — Multiplying the Harvest

“Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”
Paul draws from Isaiah 55.
“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food.”
God gives both.
Seed to plant, and bread to eat.
Some of what He gives is for our needs.
Some is to be sown for others.
“Will also supply and multiply your seed for sowing.”
God provides more seed for those who sow it.
“And increase the harvest of your righteousness.”
The harvest is not only material.
It is a harvest of righteousness.
God grows good character and good works in the giver.

Cross References

Isaiah 55:10
> Rain and snow fall from the sky and do not go back until they water the earth, making plants grow and giving seed to the farmer and bread to eat.

Hosea 10:12
> Plant right living for yourselves, and you will harvest faithful love. Break up your hard ground, because it is time to seek the Lord until He comes and pours down righteousness on you.

Genesis 8:22
> As long as the earth lasts, there will always be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.

Spiritual Principle

God supplies both what we need and what we are meant to share.

Key Truth

God trusts more seed to those who sow it.

XI. ENRICHED TO BE GENEROUS

2 Corinthians 9:11 — Resulting in Thanksgiving

“You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”
“You will be enriched in every way.”
God enriches His people.
“So that you can be generous on every occasion.”
Here is the purpose.
God does not enrich us so we can hoard.
He enriches us so we can give.
“Through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”
Paul would carry their gift to Jerusalem.
When the believers there received it, they would thank God.
Giving does not end with the gift.
It ends with worship.

Cross References

1 Timothy 6:18
Tell them to do good, to be rich in good works, and to be generous and ready to share.
2 Corinthians 4:15
All this is for your good, so that as God's grace reaches more and more people, more and more thanks will rise to the glory of God.
Psalm 50:14
Offer God your thanks as a sacrifice, and keep the promises you made to the Most High.

Spiritual Principle

God blesses us so that we can bless others and lead them to thank Him.

Application

What is God's purpose for the resources He has given you?

XII. OVERFLOWING THANKS

2 Corinthians 9:12 — More Than Meeting Needs

“For this ministry of service not only meets the needs of the saints, but also overflows in many expressions of thanks to God.”
Paul shows two results of their giving.
“Not only meets the needs of the saints.”
First, it would meet real physical needs.
Hungry people would be fed.
“But also overflows in many expressions of thanks to God.”
Second, it would cause many people to thank God.
Giving is both practical and spiritual.

It feeds bodies.
And it fills hearts with praise.

Cross References

Philippians 4:18
I have received everything you sent, and I have more than enough. Your gifts are like a sweet-smelling offering, a sacrifice that pleases God.
Romans 15:27
They were happy to do it, and they really owe it to them. The Gentiles shared in the Jewish believers' spiritual blessings, so they should share their material blessings with them.
Acts 4:34
None of them went without, because those who owned land or houses sold them and brought the money.

Spiritual Principle

Generous giving meets human needs and multiplies praise to God.

Key Truth

Every gift given in Christ's name has two harvests: a need met and a God praised.

XIII. GLORIFYING GOD

2 Corinthians 9:13 — Obedience to the Gospel

“Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.”
“Because of the proof given by this ministry.”
The gift would prove something.
It would show that the Corinthians' faith was real.
“They will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ.”
The Jewish believers might have wondered about these Gentile Christians.
Were they truly following Christ?
Their gift would answer the question.
Their actions matched what they said they believed.
“And for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.”
Their generosity would reach beyond Jerusalem.
It would be part of their way of life.

Cross References

Matthew 5:16
In the same way, let your light shine for people to see, so that they see the good you do and praise your Father in heaven.
Galatians 6:10
So whenever we have the chance, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those in the family of faith.

1 Peter 2:12
Live good lives among those who do not know God. Then, even if they speak against you, they will see the good things you do and honor God on the day He comes.

Spiritual Principle

Generosity is visible proof that our faith in the gospel is real.

Application

Does your giving show that you believe the gospel?

XIV. PRAYING AND LONGING

2 Corinthians 9:14 — The Surpassing Grace of God

“And in their prayers for you, they long for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.”
Here is another beautiful result.
“In their prayers for you.”
The believers in Jerusalem would pray for the Corinthians.
“They long for you.”
They would grow to love them.
Jewish and Gentile believers who had never met would be joined in affection.
“Because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.”
They would see God's grace at work in Corinth.
Giving builds bridges between believers.
It turns strangers into family.

Cross References

Philippians 1:8
God knows how much I long for all of you with the tender love of Christ Jesus.
Romans 1:9
God, whom I serve with my whole heart by preaching the good news about His Son, knows that I always remember you in my prayers.
Colossians 1:9
Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding the Spirit gives.

Spiritual Principle

Generosity binds believers together in love and prayer.

Key Truth

Giving turns distant believers into praying family.

XV. GOD'S INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

2 Corinthians 9:15 — Thanks Be to God

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”
Paul ends two chapters on giving with a burst of praise.
“Thanks be to God.”
All giving begins and ends with God.
“For His indescribable gift!”
What is this gift?
Most Bible students understand it as Jesus Christ Himself.
God gave His Son.
He gave salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life.
Some also include all the grace that flows from that gift, including the grace of generosity.
Either way, it all comes from Christ.
Indescribable means it cannot be fully put into words.
No matter how much we give, we can never match what God has given us.
Our giving is simply a response to His.

Cross References

James 1:17
> All the good things we receive come down from heaven, from the Father who made the lights in the sky. Unlike shifting shadows, He never changes.

John 3:16
> God's love for the world was so great that He gave His one and only Son. Anyone who puts their trust in Him will not be lost, but will live forever.

Romans 8:32
> God did not hold back even His own Son but gave Him up for all of us. So surely He will also freely give us everything else with Him.

Spiritual Principle

All our giving flows from God's indescribable gift of Jesus Christ.

Key Truth

We give because God first gave.

XVI. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 9

1. Generosity Is to Be Intentional, Not Reluctant

“Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give.”

Principle:

Giving must come from the heart, not from pressure.

2. God Blesses Cheerful Giving

“God loves a cheerful giver.”

Principle:

He multiplies both resources and spiritual fruit when believers give with joy.

3. Sowing and Reaping Is a Kingdom Principle

“Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

Principle:

The measure we use in giving reflects the measure we will reap in blessing.

4. Giving Glorifies God

“They will glorify God for your obedience.”

Principle:

When needs are met through generosity, thanksgiving and praise overflow to Him.

5. Generosity Strengthens Unity

“In their prayers for you, they long for you.”

Principle:

Giving connects believers across churches, cultures, and regions.

6. Christ Is God's Indescribable Gift

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

Principle:

Every act of giving flows from the ultimate gift of Jesus, who gave Himself for us.

XVII. THE CHEERFUL GIVER

Verse 7 describes the kind of giver God loves.

Personal

“Each person.”

Planned

“What he has decided.”

From the Heart

“In his heart.”

Not Reluctant

Not sad or sorry to let go.

Not Forced

“Not under compulsion.”

Joyful

“A cheerful giver.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God is not looking for the biggest giver, but the gladdest one.

XVIII. THE HARVEST OF GENEROSITY

Verses 6–15 show what God grows from generous sowing.

For the Giver

- All grace overflowing.
- Everything needed.
- More seed to sow.
- A harvest of righteousness.
- Enrichment for more generosity.

For Those Who Receive

- Needs are met.
- Hearts are filled with thanks.
- Prayer for the givers.
- Love for believers they have never met.

For God

- Thanksgiving.
- Glory.
- Praise for His grace.

A Word of Balance

God promises to supply what we need for every good work.
He does not promise that giving is a way to get rich.
The harvest may be in this life, in our character, or in eternity.

Key Truth

Generous sowing always produces a harvest, because God Himself is the One who gives the growth.

XIX. THE CHAIN OF GENEROSITY

This chapter shows how giving moves from God and back to God.

1. God Gives

“He who supplies seed to the sower.”

2. Believers Give

“Your generosity.”

3. Needs Are Met

“Meets the needs of the saints.”

4. Thanks Rise to God

“Many expressions of thanks to God.”

5. Believers Are United

“They long for you.”

6. God Is Glorified

“They will glorify God.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Every gift starts with God and, when given rightly, ends with God's glory.

XX. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 9 TEACHES ABOUT GOD

He Loves Cheerful Givers

“God loves a cheerful giver.”

He Is Able

“God is able to make all grace overflow to you.”

He Supplies

“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food.”

He Multiplies

“Will also supply and multiply your seed for sowing.”

He Grows Righteousness

“Increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

He Receives Thanks and Glory

“Overflows in many expressions of thanks to God.”

He Gave the Greatest Gift

“His indescribable gift.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The God who gave His Son is the God who supplies everything we need to give.

XXI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did Paul say it was unnecessary to write about the offering?
The Corinthians already knew about it and had already agreed to help.

Question 2

How had the Corinthians encouraged the Macedonians?
Their early eagerness to give stirred up most of the Macedonians to give too.

Question 3

Why did Paul send the brothers ahead?
To help the Corinthians prepare their gift so it would be ready and not rushed.

Question 4

What is the difference between generosity and grudging obligation?
Generosity is given freely from the heart.
Grudging obligation is squeezed out by pressure.

Question 5

What does Paul mean by sowing and reaping?
Generous giving is like planting seed, and God brings a harvest from what is sown.

Question 6

Does this mean giving will always make us rich?
No.

God promises to supply what we need and to bring a harvest, but the harvest may be spiritual or eternal as well as material.

Question 7

What kind of giver does God love?
A cheerful giver who gives willingly from a heart that has decided to give.

Question 8

What does God promise in verse 8?
All grace, so that we have what we need and can abound in every good work.

Question 9

Why does God enrich His people?
So they can be generous on every occasion.

Question 10

What are the two results of the offering in verse 12?
It meets the needs of the saints, and it causes many people to thank God.

Question 11

How does giving strengthen unity between believers?
Those who receive pray for the givers and grow to love them.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 9 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 9 should cause believers to live:

- Planning their giving ahead of time.
- Giving freely, not under pressure.
- Giving cheerfully.
- Trusting God to supply what they need.
- Sowing generously for God's kingdom.
- Using their blessings to bless others.
- Building love between believers through giving.
- Thanking God for His indescribable gift.

XXII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 9 asks several important questions.

Do I Keep My Promises to Give?

Is there a commitment I have not completed?

Do I Plan My Giving?

Or do I give only when I feel pushed?

Am I a Cheerful Giver?

Do I give gladly, or with regret?

Am I Sowing Sparingly?

Am I holding back from God?

Do I Trust God to Supply?

Or does fear keep my hand closed?

Am I a Channel or a Reservoir?

Do I pass on God's blessings, or store them up?

Does My Giving Lead Others to Thank God?

Does it point people to Him rather than to me?

Do I Thank God for His Indescribable Gift?

Is my heart full of gratitude for Jesus?

XXIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Farmer and the Seed”

A farmer holds a bag of seed.
He has a choice.
He can keep it in the barn.
It will be safe there.
But it will never grow.
Or he can scatter it in the field.
For a while, it looks like he has lost it.
It is buried in the ground.
He cannot see it.
But in time, it grows.
And the harvest is far greater than what he planted.
That is what Christian giving is like.
When we give, it may feel like we have lost something.
But we have not lost it.
We have planted it.
And God is the One who brings the harvest.

This creates a powerful principle.
What we keep for ourselves stays the same size.
What we sow for God, He multiplies.

Principle:

Do not hoard the seed God gives you; sow it gladly, and trust Him with the harvest.

XXIV. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 9 shows the joy of generous giving.
It teaches us to plan our giving.
It teaches us to give freely, not under pressure.
It shows that generous sowing brings a generous harvest.
It reminds us that God loves a cheerful giver.
It promises that God will supply all we need.
It shows how giving brings thanks and glory to God.
And it points us to the indescribable gift of Jesus.
2 Corinthians 9 therefore reminds us:
Never give grudgingly.
Never give only under pressure.
Never forget that God is able to supply.
Never hoard what God meant you to share.
Never forget His indescribable gift.
The church does not need people who give reluctantly.
It needs:
Givers who plan from the heart.
Givers who give with joy.
Givers who trust God to supply.
And givers whose generosity fills the world with thanks to God.
The same God still calls:
Tell people that God loves a cheerful giver.
Tell people that God is able to supply every need.
Tell people that generosity brings glory to God.
Tell people about God's indescribable gift.
And as you live:
Decide in your heart.
Give with joy.
Trust God with the harvest.
Thank Him for Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for being the God who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food.
Thank You that You are able to make all grace overflow to us.
Thank You that You give us everything we need to abound in every good work.
Thank You that You love a cheerful giver.
Thank You that no gift given for You is ever wasted.

Thank You that our giving can meet needs and fill hearts with thanks to You.
Forgive us when we have given reluctantly or under pressure.
Forgive us when we have sown sparingly because of fear.
Forgive us when we have stored up what You meant us to share.
Forgive us when we have forgotten Your indescribable gift.
Help us decide in our hearts to give.
Make us cheerful givers.
Help us trust You to supply all we need.
Let our generosity lead many to thank and praise You.
Bind us together with Your people everywhere in love and prayer.
And fill our hearts with gratitude for Jesus, Your greatest gift.
“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” — 2 Corinthians 9:7

Central Truth

God loves a cheerful giver, supplies everything His people need to be generous, multiplies what they sow for His glory, and uses their giving to meet needs, unite believers, and fill the world with thanksgiving for His indescribable gift.

2 Corinthians 9 in One Sentence

Paul urges the Corinthians to prepare their promised gift so it will be given freely and not grudgingly, teaches that generous sowing brings a generous harvest because God loves a cheerful giver and supplies all they need, and shows that their giving will meet needs, unite believers, and overflow in thanks to God for His indescribable gift.

2 Corinthians Chapter 10 —
The Weapons of Our Warfare

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 10 marks a major change in tone.
Chapters 1–9 were warm and full of comfort.
Paul rejoiced that most of the Corinthians had repented.
But in Chapters 10–13, Paul speaks more firmly.
He addresses a group in Corinth that was still opposing him.
Certain visiting teachers had come to the church.
They criticized Paul.
They said he was bold in his letters but weak in person.
They said his speaking was unimpressive.
They said he lived by worldly standards.
And they promoted themselves by comparing themselves with one another.
Paul answers them.
But he does not fight the way they fight.
He begins with the gentleness of Christ.
Then he explains how believers fight spiritual battles.
“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds.”
Paul's weapons are not human cleverness, pressure, or self-promotion.
They are the power of God, His truth, and prayer.
And the goal is to bring every thought captive to obey Christ.
Paul also explains that his authority was given by the Lord.
It was given for building people up, not tearing them down.
Finally, he refuses to measure himself by others.
He will only boast in the Lord.
“For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”
The chapter moves through five movements:

- Paul's Appeal in Christ's Gentleness (verses 1–2).
- Spiritual Warfare and Divine Power (verses 3–6).
- True Authority Comes from God (verses 7–9).
- Paul's Boldness in Letters and Deeds (verses 10–11).
- Commending Ourselves Only in the Lord (verses 12–18).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 10 is:
Believers fight spiritual battles with God's mighty weapons, bringing every thought captive to Christ, using authority only to build others up, and seeking approval not from comparison or self-promotion, but from the Lord alone.

I. THE GENTLENESS OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 10:1 — Paul's Personal Appeal

“Now I, Paul, myself appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who in person am humble among you, but when absent am bold toward you.”
“Now I, Paul, myself.”
Paul makes this appeal very personal.
He is speaking for himself.
“Appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.”
Paul does not begin with threats.
He begins with the character of Jesus.
Meekness is not weakness.
It is strength under control.
Gentleness means being patient and kind, even when you have the right to be harsh.
Jesus had all power, yet He was gentle with people.
“I who in person am humble among you, but when absent am bold toward you.”
Paul is quoting what his critics said about him.
They mocked him as timid in person and brave only in his letters.
Paul takes their insult and turns it.
His humility in person was not weakness.
It was the gentleness of Christ.

Cross References

Matthew 11:29
> Come work alongside Me and let Me teach you. I am kind and humble, and with Me your souls will find rest.

Matthew 21:5
> Tell the people of Zion, “Look, your King is coming to you. He is gentle, and He is riding on a donkey.”

Philippians 2:8
> He humbled Himself as a man and obeyed God all the way to death, even death on a cross.

Spiritual Principle

Christlike meekness is strength under control.

Application

When you are criticized, do you respond with the gentleness of Christ?

II. I BEG YOU

2 Corinthians 10:2 — Not Having to Be Bold

“I beg you that when I am present, I may not have to be bold with that confidence with which I intend to confront those who think we live according to the flesh.”
“I beg you.”

Paul pleads with them.
“That when I am present, I may not have to be bold.”
Paul was coming to Corinth again.
He hoped he would not need to be firm.
“With that confidence with which I intend to confront those.”
But if necessary, he was ready.
He would confront those who opposed the truth.
“Who think we live according to the flesh.”
His critics claimed Paul acted from worldly motives.
They said he was driven by human weakness or selfish plans.
Paul wanted the church to deal with the problem before he arrived.
He preferred gentleness.
But he would not avoid firmness if it was needed.

Cross References

Romans 8:1
God will never condemn the people who are joined to Christ Jesus.
Galatians 5:16
So I tell you, let the Spirit guide your life. Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants.
1 Corinthians 4:21
Which do you want? Should I come to you with a rod to correct you, or with love and a gentle spirit?

Spiritual Principle

Love prefers gentleness, but it will be firm when truth requires it.

Key Truth

Gentleness and firmness are not enemies; both can come from love.

III. NOT ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

2 Corinthians 10:3 — A Different Kind of War

“For though we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh.”
“Though we live in the flesh.”
Paul was a human being.
He lived in a physical body with real weaknesses.
“We do not wage war according to the flesh.”
But his battles were not fought the way the world fights.
The Christian life is a spiritual battle.
Our real enemy is not people.
It is sin, lies, and the powers of darkness.
So we cannot win with human strength, anger, or manipulation.

Cross References

Ephesians 6:12
The people around us are not our real enemy. We are in a battle with evil powers and spiritual forces that rule the darkness of this world and work in the unseen world.
1 Timothy 1:18
Timothy, my son, I give you this command because of the prophecies once spoken about you. Remember them, and fight the good fight.
John 18:36
Jesus said, “My kingdom does not come from this world. If it did, My followers would fight to keep Me from being handed over. But My kingdom is from another place.”

Spiritual Principle

Believers live in this world, but they do not fight the way this world fights.

Application

Are you trying to win spiritual battles with worldly methods?

IV. MIGHTY THROUGH GOD

2 Corinthians 10:4 — Pulling Down Strongholds

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds.”
“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.”
Carnal means fleshly or merely human.
Our weapons are not clever arguments for their own sake.
They are not pressure, threats, or popularity.
“But mighty through God.”
Our weapons have power because they come from God.
They include God's word, prayer, faith, truth, and the gospel.
“For the pulling down of strongholds.”
A **stronghold** was a fortress.
In ancient times, cities had strong walls and towers.
Paul uses this picture for spiritual fortresses.
These can be false ideas, pride, sinful patterns, or lies that people trust in.
Human strength cannot tear them down.
But God's power can.

Cross References

Ephesians 6:11
Put on all the armor God provides, so you can stand firm against the devil's tricks.
Jeremiah 1:10
Today I am putting you in charge of nations and kingdoms, to pull up and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, and to build and to plant.
Proverbs 21:22
A wise person can attack a city of strong soldiers and tear down the fortress they trusted.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual strongholds fall only by God's power.

Key Truth

No stronghold is too strong for the weapons God gives.

V. EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE

2 Corinthians 10:5 — Obeying Christ

“We demolish arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.”
Paul now describes what the strongholds are.
“We demolish arguments.”
These are ideas and reasonings that oppose God's truth.
“And every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.”
Pride builds high towers in the mind.
It sets itself up against God.
It refuses to bow to Him.
“And we take every thought captive to obey Christ.”
This is the goal.
The battle is fought in the mind.
A captive is a prisoner brought under control.
Paul pictures every thought being brought under the authority of Christ.
This includes the false ideas of others.
It also includes our own thoughts.
Victory begins in the mind.

Cross References

Colossians 2:8
> Be careful that no one captures your mind with empty, deceiving ideas that come from human tradition and the powers of this world, and not from Christ.

Isaiah 55:8
> The Lord says, “My thoughts are not like your thoughts, and My ways are not like your ways.”

Proverbs 21:30
> No wisdom, no understanding, and no plan can succeed against the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

True victory begins when every thought is brought under the authority of Christ.

Application

What thought do you need to take captive and bring to Christ today?

VI. READY TO DEAL WITH DISOBEDIENCE

2 Corinthians 10:6 — Once Your Obedience Is Complete

“And we are ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.”
“We are ready to punish every act of disobedience.”
Paul was prepared to discipline those who kept rebelling.
As an apostle, he had authority to deal with them.
“Once your obedience is complete.”
But first, Paul wanted the whole church to be fully obedient.
He wanted the faithful members to take their stand first.
Then he would deal with those who remained rebellious.
Paul was patient.
He gave the church time to respond.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 2:9
I wrote to you to test you, to see if you would obey in every way.
1 Peter 2:15
God wants you to silence the foolish talk of ignorant people by doing what is good.
Hebrews 5:9
After He was made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for everyone who obeys Him.

Spiritual Principle

God's discipline is patient, giving His people time to obey.

Key Truth

Church discipline should wait for the faithful to stand firm, and then deal wisely with ongoing rebellion.

VII. LOOK BEYOND APPEARANCES

2 Corinthians 10:7 — We Also Belong to Christ

“Do you look only on outward appearances? If anyone is convinced that he belongs to Christ, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.”
“Do you look only on outward appearances?”
Some Corinthians judged by what was on the surface.
The false teachers looked impressive.
Paul did not.
But looks can fool people.
“If anyone is convinced that he belongs to Christ.”
Some were claiming a special connection to Christ.
“Let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.”
Paul says, think again.

If they belong to Christ, so does Paul.
No one has a monopoly on Christ.

Cross References

1 Samuel 16:7
The Lord said to Samuel, “Do not judge by how he looks or how tall he is. People look at the outside, but I look at the heart.”
John 7:24
Stop judging by what you see on the surface. Judge fairly and rightly.
Galatians 3:29
If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's children and will receive what God promised.

Spiritual Principle

God judges the heart, not outward appearance, and so should we.

Application

Are you judging any servant of God by appearance alone?

VIII. AUTHORITY FOR BUILDING UP

2 Corinthians 10:8 — Not for Tearing Down

“For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us—for building you up, not for tearing you down—I will not be ashamed.”
“Even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us.”
Paul's authority was real.
It was given by the Lord.
Not by himself.
“For building you up, not for tearing you down.”
This is the purpose of spiritual authority.
God gives leaders authority to build people up.
To strengthen them.
To help them grow.
Not to control them or crush them.
“I will not be ashamed.”
Paul could defend his authority without shame, because he had used it rightly.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 13:10
That is why I write these things while I am away. Then when I come, I will not have to be harsh in using the authority the Lord gave me to build you up, not to tear you down.
Ephesians 4:29
Do not let any harmful words come out of your mouths. Say only what helps others grow and meets their needs, so that what you say does good to those who hear it.
Jeremiah 1:10
Look, I have given you authority over nations to tear down and to destroy, and also to build and to plant.

Spiritual Principle

Authority in the church is given to build people up, not to dominate them.

Key Truth

The test of godly leadership is whether people are strengthened by it.

IX. NOT TRYING TO FRIGHTEN YOU

2 Corinthians 10:9 — Paul's Letters

“I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters.”
Paul's letters had been strong.
Some accused him of trying to scare people.
Paul says that was never his goal.
He wrote out of love.
He wrote to correct and to heal.
Not to frighten or control.

Cross References

1 Thessalonians 2:11
You know that we treated each of you the way a father treats his own children.
2 Corinthians 1:24
We are not trying to control your faith. We are working with you for your joy, because you stand firm by faith.
1 Corinthians 4:21
What do you want? Shall I come with a stick, or with love and gentleness?

Spiritual Principle

Godly correction aims to heal, not to frighten.

Application

When you correct others, is your goal to help them or to scare them?

X. WEIGHTY LETTERS, WEAK PRESENCE

2 Corinthians 10:10 — What the Critics Said

“For some say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech amounts to nothing.””
Here Paul quotes his critics directly.
“His letters are weighty and strong.”
They admitted his letters were powerful.
“But his bodily presence is weak.”
They said he was unimpressive in person.
Some believe Paul may have had a physical weakness or illness.
“And his speech amounts to nothing.”

They said he was a poor speaker.
In Corinth, people admired polished speakers.
Paul did not try to impress with clever speech.
He preached Christ crucified in weakness, so that faith would rest on God's power.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 2:3
When I was with you, I felt weak and afraid, and I was trembling.
Galatians 4:13
You remember that I first preached the gospel to you because I was sick.
1 Corinthians 2:1
Brothers and sisters, when I came to you, I did not use fancy words or show off my wisdom when I told you God's message.

Spiritual Principle

God's power is not limited by the weakness of His messenger.

Key Truth

God does not need impressive people; He needs faithful ones.

XI. WORDS AND DEEDS THE SAME

2 Corinthians 10:11 — In Letters and in Actions

“Let such people realize this: What we are in letters when absent, we will also be in actions when present.”
Paul answers the charge.
His critics said he was all talk.
Paul says his words and his actions match.
When he arrives, he will act just as firmly as he wrote.
Paul was a man of integrity.
What he said, he did.

Cross References

James 1:22
Do not just listen to God's word and fool yourselves. Do what it says.
Titus 1:16
They say they know God, but the way they live shows they do not.
1 John 3:18
Little children, let us love not only in what we say, but in what we truly do.

Spiritual Principle

Integrity means our actions match our words.

Application

Do your actions match what you say you believe?

XII. THE FOLLY OF COMPARISON

2 Corinthians 10:12 — Measuring by One Another

“For we dare not classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.”
“We dare not classify or compare ourselves.”
Paul says this with a touch of irony.
He would not join their game.
“With some who commend themselves.”
The false teachers praised themselves.
“When they measure themselves by one another.”
They used each other as the standard.
They looked good only because they compared themselves with people like themselves.
“They are without understanding.”
This is foolish.
If you measure yourself only by others, you will never see yourself truly.
The true standard is God, not people.

Cross References

Proverbs 27:2
> Let someone else praise you, not your own mouth. Let a stranger do it, not your own lips.

Luke 18:11
> The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself: “God, I thank You that I am not like other people, like robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even this tax collector.”

Romans 12:3
> God has given me grace, so I am telling each of you: do not puff yourself up. Look at yourself honestly, using the faith God has handed out to you as your measure.

Spiritual Principle

Comparing ourselves with others leads to pride and blindness.

Spiritual Warning

If you measure yourself by others, you will always find someone who makes you look good.

XIII. WITHIN PROPER LIMITS

2 Corinthians 10:13 — The Field God Assigned

“But we will not boast beyond proper limits, but only within the field of service God has assigned to us—a field that extends even to you.”
“We will not boast beyond proper limits.”
Paul would not claim more than God had given him.
“But only within the field of service God has assigned to us.”
God gives each servant a field of work.

Paul's field was to preach to the Gentiles.
“A field that extends even to you.”
Corinth was within Paul's field.
God had sent him there.
He had founded the church.
The false teachers had come into a field God had given to Paul.

Cross References

Romans 12:3
> By the grace God has given me, I say to each of you: do not think too highly of yourself. Be honest about yourself, measuring yourself by the faith God gave you.

Romans 15:20
> My goal has always been to preach the gospel where Christ has not been heard of, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

1 Corinthians 3:5
> Who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only servants who helped you believe. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.

Spiritual Principle

Be faithful in the field God has given you, without claiming what He has not.

Application

What field of service has God given you?

XIV. FIRST TO CORINTH

2 Corinthians 10:14 — Coming with the Gospel

“For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we had not reached you, since we came to you with the gospel of Christ.”
“We are not overextending ourselves.”
Paul was not reaching too far.
“As though we had not reached you.”
He had actually come to Corinth.
“Since we came to you with the gospel of Christ.”
Paul was the first to bring the gospel to Corinth.
He planted the church there.
His claim was not empty.
It rested on what God had done through him.

Cross References

Romans 15:20
> I have always wanted to preach where Christ's name was not yet known, so I would not build on another person's work.

Acts 18:1
> After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

Romans 1:15
That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel to you who live in Rome too.

Spiritual Principle

God's servants can speak with confidence about what God has truly done through them.

Key Truth

Honest testimony points to what God has done, not to what we wish we had done.

XV. A GROWING FIELD

2 Corinthians 10:15 — As Your Faith Increases

“We do not boast beyond proper limits in the labors of others. Instead, we hope that, as your faith increases, our area of ministry among you will be greatly enlarged.”
“We do not boast beyond proper limits in the labors of others.”
Paul did not take credit for other people's work.
The false teachers were doing exactly that.
They came into a church Paul had planted and acted as if it were theirs.
“As your faith increases.”
Paul hoped the Corinthians would grow spiritually.
“Our area of ministry among you will be greatly enlarged.”
As they grew, Paul's work would grow.
A strong church would become a base for reaching further.

Cross References

Romans 15:20
It has been my aim to tell the good news where Christ is unknown, so I would not build on a foundation someone else laid.
1 Corinthians 3:6
My job was the planting, and Apollos did the watering. But the growing came from God.
Colossians 1:28
We tell people about Christ. We warn and teach everyone with all wisdom, so that we can present each person mature in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The growth of believers opens the door for wider ministry.

Application

Is your spiritual growth helping the gospel spread further?

XVI. THE REGIONS BEYOND

2 Corinthians 10:16 — Preaching Further

“Then we may preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, without boasting in another man's work already done.”
“Then we may preach the gospel in the regions beyond you.”
Paul's heart always looked further.
He wanted to take the gospel to places that had never heard.
Later he hoped to go as far as Spain.
“Without boasting in another man's work already done.”
Paul did not want to build on someone else's foundation.
He wanted to go where Christ was not yet known.
This is the heart of a missionary.

Cross References

Romans 15:20
I have made it my aim to preach where people have never heard of Christ.
Romans 15:23
Now there is no more place for me to work in these areas, and for many years I have wanted to visit you.
1 Corinthians 3:10
By the grace God gave me, I laid a foundation like a skilled builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one must be careful how he builds.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel always reaches toward those who have not yet heard.

Key Truth

God's people should always be looking to the regions beyond.

XVII. BOAST IN THE LORD

2 Corinthians 10:17 — The Right Kind of Boasting

“But, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.””
Paul quotes Jeremiah 9.
He had also used this verse in 1 Corinthians 1.
It sums up the whole chapter.
Do not boast in your gifts.
Do not boast in your speaking.
Do not boast in your appearance.
Do not boast in your success.
Boast in the Lord.
Everything good in our lives and ministry comes from Him.

Cross References

Jeremiah 9:24
If anyone wants to boast, let him boast that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who shows faithful love, fairness, and right living on the earth, because these things please Me.
1 Corinthians 1:31
So, as the Scriptures say, “If anyone is going to brag, let him brag about the Lord.”
Galatians 6:14
I never want to brag about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Principle

All glory belongs to God, so all boasting should be about Him.

Application

When people praise you, do you point them to the Lord?

XVIII. THE LORD'S APPROVAL

2 Corinthians 10:18 — Whom the Lord Commends

“For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”
“It is not the one who commends himself who is approved.”
Self-praise means nothing in God's eyes.
The false teachers wrote their own recommendations.
But their praise of themselves proved nothing.
“But the one whom the Lord commends.”
The only approval that matters is the Lord's.
One day, every servant will stand before Him.
His word will be the final word.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:5
So do not judge anything before the right time. Wait until the Lord comes. He will bring hidden things to light and show the motives of every heart. Then each person will receive praise from God.
Romans 2:29
A true Jew is one who is Jewish inside, whose heart has been changed by the Spirit, not by written rules. That person's praise comes from God, not from people.
Proverbs 27:2
Do not praise yourself. Let other people do it, even someone you do not know.

Spiritual Principle

Only the Lord's approval truly counts.

Key Truth

Live for the One whose “Well done” matters forever.

XIX. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 10

1. Christlike Meekness Is Strength Under Control

“I appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.”

Principle:

Paul appeals gently but stands ready to act firmly if necessary.

2. Spiritual Battles Require Spiritual Weapons

“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God.”

Principle:

Arguments, pride, and lies must be torn down by truth and prayer, not worldly means.

3. Every Thought Must Be Brought Under Christ

“We take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

Principle:

True victory begins in the mind.

4. Authority in the Church Is for Building Up

“For building you up, not for tearing you down.”

Principle:

Leaders are given authority to strengthen others, not to dominate them.

5. Self-Commendation Is Empty

“It is not the one who commends himself who is approved.”

Principle:

True approval comes only from the Lord, not from human comparisons.

6. Boasting Belongs to God Alone

“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Principle:

All victories, growth, and ministry fruit must be credited to Him.

XX. THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

Verses 3–6 describe the Christian's spiritual battle.

The Battle

It is spiritual, not physical.

The Enemy

- Arguments against God.
- Pride that lifts itself up against God.
- Lies and false ideas.
- Thoughts that refuse to obey Christ.

The Weapons

- The word of God.
- Prayer.
- Faith.
- Truth.
- The gospel of Christ.

Weapons We Do Not Use

- Manipulation.
- Pressure and threats.
- Anger and insults.
- Self-promotion.

The Goal

“Every thought captive to obey Christ.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The battle is the Lord's, and so is the power to win it.

XXI. TAKING THOUGHTS CAPTIVE

Verse 5 gives practical help for the battle of the mind.

1. Notice the Thought

Pay attention to what you are thinking.

2. Test the Thought

Ask, “Is this true according to God's word?”

3. Capture the Thought

Do not let a false or sinful thought run free.

4. Bring It to Christ

Hand it over to Him in prayer.

5. Replace It with Truth

Fill your mind with what God says.

6. Obey Christ

Let your actions follow His truth.

Key Truth

What we allow to rule our minds will soon rule our lives.

XXII. COMPARISON VERSUS THE LORD'S APPROVAL

Verses 12–18 show two different ways to measure a life.

The World's Way

- Commend yourself.
- Compare yourself with others.
- Take credit for other people's work.
- Boast in yourself.
- Seek the approval of people.

God's Way

- Let the Lord commend you.
- Measure yourself by God's standard.
- Be faithful in the field God gives you.
- Boast in the Lord.
- Seek the approval of God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Stop comparing yourself with others; start living for the Lord's approval.

XXIII. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 10 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

He Is Meek and Gentle

“The meekness and gentleness of Christ.”

He Is the One We Obey

“Every thought captive to obey Christ.”

We Belong to Him

“Just as he is Christ's, so also are we.”

He Gives Authority to His Servants

“The authority the Lord gave us.”

His Gospel Must Go Further

“The gospel of Christ... in the regions beyond.”

He Is the One Who Commends

“The one whom the Lord commends.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gentle Christ is also the mighty Lord whose truth tears down strongholds and whose approval is all that matters.

XXIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why does Paul's tone change in Chapter 10?
He turns to address a group in Corinth that was still opposing him and following false teachers.

Question 2

What is meekness?
Strength under control, shown in gentleness and patience even when one has power.

Question 3

What did Paul's critics say about him?

That he was bold in letters but weak in person, a poor speaker, and that he lived by worldly standards.

Question 4

What does it mean that we do not wage war according to the flesh?
Our battles are spiritual, so we do not fight with human strength, anger, or manipulation.

Question 5

What are our spiritual weapons?
God's word, prayer, faith, truth, and the gospel, made mighty by God's power.

Question 6

What are strongholds?
Spiritual fortresses such as false ideas, pride, and sinful patterns that set themselves against God.

Question 7

What does it mean to take every thought captive?
To bring each thought under Christ's authority, rejecting what is false and obeying what is true.

Question 8

What is the purpose of authority in the church?
To build people up, not to tear them down.

Question 9

How did Paul answer the charge that he was all talk?
He said his actions in person would match his words in his letters.

Question 10

Why is comparing ourselves with others foolish?
Because others are not the true standard.
Comparison leads to pride or blindness.

Question 11

What does it mean to boast in the Lord?
To give God credit for everything good in our lives and ministry.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 10 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 10 should cause believers to live:

- Responding to criticism with Christ's gentleness.
- Fighting spiritual battles with spiritual weapons.
- Taking every thought captive to Christ.
- Using any authority to build others up.
- Letting their actions match their words.

- Refusing to compare themselves with others.
- Being faithful in the field God has given them.
- Seeking the Lord's approval above all.

XXV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 10 asks several important questions.

How Do I Respond to Criticism?

With anger, or with the gentleness of Christ?

What Weapons Am I Using?

God's word and prayer, or worldly methods?

Is There a Stronghold in My Life?

What area needs to be torn down by God's power?

Am I Taking My Thoughts Captive?

Or am I letting them run free?

How Do I Use My Influence?

Do I build others up or tear them down?

Do My Words and Actions Match?

Am I the same in public and in private?

Do I Compare Myself with Others?

Does it make me proud or discouraged?

Whose Approval Am I Seeking?

The Lord's, or people's?

XXVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Battle for the Mind”

Every war has a battlefield.
For the Christian, one of the most important battlefields is the mind.
Sin usually begins with a thought.
A lie believed.

A doubt welcomed.
A proud idea entertained.
A bitter thought replayed again and again.
If the thought is left alone, it grows.
It becomes an attitude.
The attitude becomes a habit.
The habit becomes a stronghold.
But God has given us weapons.
His word exposes the lie.
Prayer brings the battle to Him.
His Spirit gives us strength.
We can capture the thought before it captures us.
This creates a powerful principle.
Strongholds are built one thought at a time.
And with God's help, they can be torn down one thought at a time.

Principle:

Win the battle for your mind by bringing every thought to Christ.

XXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 10 shows how a servant of Christ fights.
He begins with gentleness.
He fights with spiritual weapons.
He brings every thought captive to Christ.
He uses authority to build up.
He lives with integrity.
He refuses to compare himself with others.
And he boasts only in the Lord.
2 Corinthians 10 therefore reminds us:
Never mistake gentleness for weakness.
Never fight spiritual battles with worldly weapons.
Never let your thoughts run free from Christ.
Never use authority to tear people down.
Never measure yourself by others.
The church does not need people who promote themselves.
It needs:
Servants who are gentle like Christ.
Soldiers who fight with God's weapons.
Minds that are captive to Christ.
And hearts that seek only the Lord's approval.
The same Lord still calls:
Tell people that God's power can tear down any stronghold.
Tell people that every thought can be brought to Christ.
Tell people that the Lord's approval is what matters.
Tell people the gospel, even in the regions beyond.
And as you live:
Be gentle.

Fight with God's weapons.
Take every thought captive.
Boast in the Lord.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for the meekness and gentleness of Christ.
Thank You that we do not fight our battles alone or in our own strength.
Thank You for the weapons You have given us, mighty through You for pulling down strongholds.
Thank You that every lie, every proud thought, and every argument against You can be torn down.
Thank You that Your servants are given authority to build up and not to tear down.
Thank You that Your approval is what truly matters.
Forgive us when we have responded to others without gentleness.
Forgive us when we have fought with worldly weapons.
Forgive us when we have let our thoughts run free from Christ.
Forgive us when we have compared ourselves with others and sought people's praise.
Help us take every thought captive to obey Christ.
Tear down every stronghold in our lives.
Let our words and actions match.
Make us faithful in the field You have given us.
Send Your gospel to the regions beyond.
And teach us to boast only in You.
“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds.” — 2 Corinthians 10:4

Central Truth

Believers fight spiritual battles with God's mighty weapons, bringing every thought captive to Christ, using authority only to build others up, and seeking approval not from comparison or self-promotion, but from the Lord alone.

2 Corinthians 10 in One Sentence

Paul appeals to the Corinthians by the gentleness of Christ, explains that believers fight with spiritual weapons that tear down strongholds and take every thought captive to Christ, defends his God-given authority to build them up, and refuses to compare himself with others because only the one the Lord commends is truly approved.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 11 — Paul’s Jealousy, Sufferings, and Apostolic Credentials

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 11 is one of the most personal chapters Paul ever wrote.
False teachers had come into the church at Corinth.
Paul calls them **“super-apostles.”**
They were impressive speakers.
They boasted about their background and their achievements.
They looked down on Paul.
And the Corinthians were listening to them.
Paul hated boasting.
In Chapter 10 he said, **“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”**
But now he feels forced to answer these men on their own terms.
So he calls it **“foolishness.”**
He will boast, but only to protect the church.
Paul's concern is like a father protecting his daughter before her wedding.
He had promised the church to Christ.
He did not want her led astray, as the serpent deceived Eve.
Paul then exposes the false apostles.
“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”
Then comes his surprising list of credentials.
The false teachers boasted of their successes.
Paul boasts of his sufferings.
Beatings, prison, shipwrecks, dangers, hunger, cold, sleepless nights.
And the daily weight of caring for all the churches.
Finally, he boasts about the most humbling moment of all.
Being let down over a city wall in a basket to escape.
Paul's message is clear.
The true servant of Christ is not proven by impressive words.
He is proven by faithful suffering for Christ.
The chapter moves through six movements:

- Paul's Godly Jealousy for the Church (verses 1–4).
- Paul's Apostolic Authority (verses 5–11).
- False Apostles and Deception (verses 12–15).

- Paul's Sufferings for Christ (verses 16–21).
- Paul's Credentials in Suffering (verses 22–29).
- Paul's Boast in Weakness (verses 30–33).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 11 is:
True servants of Christ guard the church's pure devotion to Him, expose deception that comes disguised as light, and are proven not by impressive boasting but by faithful suffering and weakness through which God's strength is shown.

I. A LITTLE FOOLISHNESS

2 Corinthians 11:1 — Bear with Me

“I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Yes, bear with me.”
Paul is about to do something he does not like to do.
He is going to boast.
He calls it **“foolishness.”**
Boasting about himself went against everything he believed.
But the Corinthians were being won over by men who boasted.
So Paul asks them to be patient with him.
“Yes, bear with me.”
He knows they have been very patient with the false teachers.
He asks for a little patience for himself.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:16
I say it again: do not think I am a fool. But if you do, then accept me as a fool so I can brag a little too.
2 Corinthians 12:11
I have been acting like a fool, but you made me do it. You should have been the ones speaking well of me.
Proverbs 26:5
Sometimes you must answer a foolish person in a way that matches his foolishness, or he will think he is wise.

Spiritual Principle

Love sometimes does uncomfortable things to protect God's people.

Key Truth

Paul's “foolish” boasting was not for his own glory but for the church's good.

II. GODLY JEALOUSY

2 Corinthians 11:2 — A Pure Bride for Christ

“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.”
This is not selfish jealousy.
It is the jealousy God has for His people.
God wants His people's whole heart.
“I promised you in marriage to one husband.”
Paul uses a wedding picture.
In those days, a father promised his daughter to a husband.
Then he guarded her until the wedding.
Paul had led the Corinthians to Christ.
He had “promised” them to Christ.
“To present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”
Paul wanted to present the church to Christ faithful and pure.
The church is the bride of Christ.
One day He will return for His bride.

Cross References

Ephesians 5:27
> Christ wants to bring the church to Himself as a shining bride, clean and holy, with no spot, no wrinkle, and nothing wrong with her.

Revelation 21:2
> I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It was ready like a bride dressed beautifully for her husband.

Hosea 2:19
> I will make you My bride forever. I will marry you with right living and justice, with faithful love and tender mercy.

Spiritual Principle

The church belongs to Christ alone and must remain faithful to Him.

Application

Is your heart fully devoted to Christ, or divided?

III. THE SERPENT'S CUNNING

2 Corinthians 11:3 — Led Astray

“But I am afraid that, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”
“I am afraid.”
Paul was afraid for them.
“Just as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning.”
Paul points back to the garden.
The serpent did not attack Eve openly.
He used clever words.
He twisted what God had said.
He made sin look good.
“Your minds may be led astray.”

The danger was in their thinking.
False teaching works the same way.
“From the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”
Simplicity means single-hearted.
Purity means unmixed.
Satan's goal is to pull hearts away from a simple, pure love for Christ.
He often does it by adding to Christ or twisting Christ.

Cross References

Genesis 3:1
> The serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal the Lord God had made. He asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat from any tree in the garden?”

Genesis 3:13
> The Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?” The woman answered, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

1 Timothy 2:14
> Adam was not the one who was fooled. The woman was fooled and fell into sin.

Spiritual Principle

Satan's oldest strategy is to lead minds away from simple devotion to Christ.

Spiritual Warning

Deception rarely looks dangerous. It usually looks reasonable.

IV. ANOTHER JESUS, ANOTHER GOSPEL

2 Corinthians 11:4 — Put Up With Too Easily

“For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit than the one you received, or a different gospel than the one you accepted—you put up with it too easily.”
Paul names three dangers.
“Another Jesus.”
The false teachers used the name of Jesus.
But they did not preach the true Jesus.
“A different spirit.”
Their teaching came from a different spirit, not the Holy Spirit.
“A different gospel.”
Their message was not the true good news.
“You put up with it too easily.”
This was Paul's great concern.
The Corinthians were not standing against it.
They were tolerating it.
It is possible to use Christian words and still preach a false message.

Cross References

Galatians 1:6
It shocks me how fast you are leaving God, who called you through Christ's grace, and are following some other so-called good news.
Galatians 1:8
Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel different from the one we preached to you, let God's curse be on him.
1 John 4:1
My friends, do not trust every voice that claims to speak by the Spirit. Check it to see if it really comes from God. Many fake prophets are out in the world today.

Spiritual Principle

Not everyone who speaks of Jesus preaches the true Jesus.

Application

Do you test what you hear by God's word?

V. THE SUPER-APOSTLES

2 Corinthians 11:5 — Not Inferior

“I do not think I am in the least inferior to those “super-apostles.””
Paul uses a mocking title.
“Super-apostles.”
These were the false teachers who thought highly of themselves.
Paul says plainly that he is not inferior to them in any way.
This is not pride.
It is a defense of his God-given calling.
If the Corinthians rejected Paul, they would be rejecting the gospel he preached.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 12:11
I am not less than those super-apostles in any way, even though I am nothing.
1 Corinthians 15:10
Whatever I am now, God's grace made me. And His grace in me did not go to waste. I worked harder than all of them, but it was God's grace doing the work through me.
Galatians 2:6
Those who seemed important added nothing to my message. What they were makes no difference to me, because God does not judge by outward appearance.

Spiritual Principle

God's calling, not human impressiveness, makes a true servant.

Key Truth

Do not be dazzled by self-promoting leaders.

VI. UNTRAINED IN SPEECH, NOT IN KNOWLEDGE

2 Corinthians 11:6 — Made Plain to You

“Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, we have made this plain to you in every way.”
“Even if I am unskilled in speaking.”
Paul admits he was not a polished speaker by Greek standards.
He did not use the showy methods of professional speakers.
“I am not so in knowledge.”
But he knew the truth.
He knew the gospel and the mind of God revealed to him.
“We have made this plain to you in every way.”
The Corinthians had seen this for themselves.
Truth matters more than style.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:17
> Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with clever speech, so that the cross of Christ would not lose its power.

1 Corinthians 2:1
> When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come with impressive speech or great wisdom as I told you about God.

Exodus 4:10
> Moses said to the Lord, “Lord, I have never been a good speaker. I am slow to speak and my words do not come easily.”

Spiritual Principle

God values the truth of the message more than the polish of the messenger.

Key Truth

A plain speaker with the truth is better than a gifted speaker with a lie.

VII. FREE OF CHARGE

2 Corinthians 11:7 — Humbling Himself

“Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?”
Paul uses a little irony here.
Some criticized Paul for not accepting payment from the Corinthians.
In their culture, a great teacher was paid.
Working with your hands seemed low.
So they thought Paul must not be a real apostle.

“Did I commit a sin by humbling myself?”
Paul had worked as a tentmaker.
He did it so that the gospel would cost them nothing.
“So that you might be exalted.”
He lowered himself to lift them up.
That was what Christ did too.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 9:18
> What is my reward then? It is that I can preach the gospel for free, without using my right to be paid.

Acts 20:33
> I have never wanted anyone's money or clothing.

Philippians 4:15
> You Philippians remember that in the early days of the gospel, no other church shared in my needs except you.

Spiritual Principle

True servants lower themselves to lift others up.

Application

Are you willing to give up your rights for the sake of the gospel?

VIII. ROBBING OTHER CHURCHES

2 Corinthians 11:8 — Support from Others

“I robbed other churches, taking support from them, in order to serve you.”
Paul uses strong language to make a point.
“I robbed other churches.”
He did not really steal.
He means that other churches paid for his ministry in Corinth.
It was as if he took from them to give to the Corinthians.
“In order to serve you.”
The Corinthians received his ministry without paying for it.
Other churches had paid the cost.

Cross References

Philippians 4:15
> When I left Macedonia, you were the only church that partnered with me in giving and receiving.

Philippians 4:16
> Even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help more than once when I needed it.

1 Corinthians 9:14
> In the same way, the Lord has ordered that those who preach the gospel should get their living from the gospel.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel often reaches one place through the sacrifice of believers in another.

Key Truth

Supporting missionaries is a way of sharing in their work.

IX. NOT A BURDEN

2 Corinthians 11:9 — Supplied by Macedonia

“When I was with you and in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.”
“When I was with you and in need.”
Paul sometimes had real needs.
“I did not burden anyone.”
He did not ask the Corinthians for help.
“For the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need.”
Believers from Macedonia brought gifts.
“I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.”
Paul would not change his policy.
He would not give his critics any reason to say he was in it for money.

Cross References

Philippians 4:15
> You know that when I first preached the good news, no church helped me except you.

Philippians 4:18
> I have received everything you sent with Epaphroditus, and I have more than enough. Your gifts are a pleasing offering to God.

Acts 18:5
> When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul gave all his time to preaching, telling the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

Spiritual Principle

God's servants should guard against anything that makes the gospel look like a business.

Application

Are your motives in serving God clear of selfish gain?

X. THIS BOASTING WILL NOT BE SILENCED

2 Corinthians 11:10 — The Truth of Christ

“As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, no one in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine.”
“As surely as the truth of Christ is in me.”
Paul makes a solemn statement.
“No one in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine.”
Achaia was the region around Corinth.
Paul's “boast” was that he preached for free.
No one would take that away from him.
He would keep serving them without pay.

Cross References

Romans 9:1
> I am telling the truth in Christ, and I am not lying. My conscience, guided by the Holy Spirit, confirms it.

2 Corinthians 1:23
> I call God as my witness that I did not come back to Corinth because I wanted to spare you.

Romans 15:26
> The believers in Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to give an offering for the poor among God's people in Jerusalem.

Spiritual Principle

A servant's integrity is a treasure worth protecting.

Key Truth

Some things are worth refusing so that the gospel stays pure.

XI. GOD KNOWS I LOVE YOU

2 Corinthians 11:11 — Why?

“Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!”
Some may have said Paul refused their money because he did not love them.
Paul answers with deep feeling.
“God knows I do!”
Paul calls God as his witness.
His refusal to take their money was not coldness.
It was love.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 6:11
Dear Corinthians, we have spoken openly with you, and our hearts are wide open to you.
Philippians 1:8
God is my witness of how much I long for all of you with the deep love of Christ Jesus.
John 21:17
Peter was hurt that Jesus asked him the third time. He said, “Lord, You know everything. You know I love You.”

Spiritual Principle

Love is sometimes misunderstood, but God knows the heart.

Application

When your love is misunderstood, can you rest in the fact that God knows?

XII. CUTTING THE GROUND FROM UNDER THEM

2 Corinthians 11:12 — Removing Their Opportunity

“But I will continue doing what I am doing, in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be regarded as equal with us in the things they boast about.”
“I will continue doing what I am doing.”
Paul would keep preaching for free.
“In order to cut the ground from under those.”
The false teachers wanted to say they worked just like Paul.
But they were taking money.
As long as Paul served for free, they could not claim to be equal with him.
His sacrifice exposed their motives.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:18
Since many people are bragging about worldly things, I will brag too.
Galatians 6:12
Those who want to look good to people are trying to force you to be circumcised, so they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.
2 Corinthians 2:17
We are not like the many who sell God's word for profit. We speak with sincerity in Christ, as people sent from God and standing before Him.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful sacrifice exposes false motives.

Key Truth

The way a servant handles money often reveals his heart.

XIII. FALSE APOSTLES

2 Corinthians 11:13 — Disguised as Apostles of Christ

“For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”
Paul now speaks very plainly.
“False apostles.”
They claimed to be sent by Christ, but they were not.
“Deceitful workers.”
Their work was based on deception.
“Disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”
They wore a mask.
On the outside they looked like servants of Christ.
On the inside they were not.

Cross References

Matthew 7:15
> Be on guard against fake prophets. They dress up like harmless sheep when they come to you, but underneath they are wolves ready to tear you apart.

Acts 20:29
> I know that after I leave, vicious wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

Revelation 2:2
> I know what you do, how hard you work, and how you endure. I know you cannot stand evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and you found them to be liars.

Spiritual Principle

Not everyone who claims to serve Christ truly does.

Spiritual Warning

A false teacher's greatest weapon is looking genuine.

XIV. AN ANGEL OF LIGHT

2 Corinthians 11:14 — Satan's Disguise

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”
“And no wonder.”
This should not surprise us.
“For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”
Satan is a master of disguise.
He does not usually come looking evil.
He comes looking good.
He comes looking bright, wise, and attractive.
He came to Eve with a reasonable-sounding question.

He still works this way today.

Cross References

Genesis 3:1
The serpent was the most cunning of all the animals. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say you cannot eat from any tree in the garden?”
Job 1:6
One day the angels came to stand before the Lord, and Satan came along with them.
Revelation 12:9
The great dragon was thrown down. He is the ancient serpent called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.

Spiritual Principle

Satan's most dangerous lies come dressed as light.

Spiritual Warning

Do not judge a message by how good it looks, but by whether it agrees with God's word.

XV. THEIR END

2 Corinthians 11:15 — According to Their Deeds

“So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.”
“His servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”
If Satan disguises himself, so will his servants.
They will look like good, moral people.
They will speak about righteousness.
“Their end will correspond to their deeds.”
God sees through every disguise.
In the end, He will judge them by what they truly did.

Cross References

Matthew 7:22
On that day many will say to Me, “Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons, and do many miracles?”
Jude 1:13
They are like wild ocean waves, foaming up their shame. They are like wandering stars, and the deepest darkness is kept for them forever.
Romans 2:6
God will repay every person according to what they have done.

Spiritual Principle

God sees through every disguise and will judge with perfect justice.

Key Truth

No mask will last on the day of judgment.

XVI. RECEIVE ME AS A FOOL

2 Corinthians 11:16 — Boasting a Little

“I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I too may boast a little.”
Paul returns to his “foolish” boasting.
“Let no one think me foolish.”
Paul is not really a fool.
“But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool.”
If they insist on seeing him that way, let them at least listen.
“So that I too may boast a little.”
Paul's boasting is for a purpose.
He wants to show what a true apostle looks like.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:1
I hope you will put up with a little foolishness from me. Please be patient with me.
1 Corinthians 4:10
We are fools for Christ, but you think you are so wise in Christ.
2 Corinthians 12:11
I have made a fool of myself, but you forced me to.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes truth must be defended even when it feels awkward.

Key Truth

Paul boasted only to rescue the church from deception.

XVII. NOT AS THE LORD WOULD

2 Corinthians 11:17 — Speaking as a Fool

“What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as a fool.”
Paul is honest.
He says boasting is not the way the Lord would speak.
Jesus did not promote Himself.
Paul admits he is stepping outside the normal Christian way of speaking.
He does it only because the situation forces him to.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 7:12
To the rest I say this, and it is my word, not a command from the Lord.
2 Corinthians 11:21
Whatever anyone else dares to brag about—I am talking like a fool—I can brag about it too.

1 Corinthians 7:6
I say this as a suggestion, not as a command.

Spiritual Principle

Self-promotion is not the way of Christ.

Application

Do you find yourself promoting yourself more than Christ?

XVIII. BOASTING LIKE THE OTHERS

2 Corinthians 11:18 — According to the Flesh

“Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast.”
“Many boast according to the flesh.”
The false teachers boasted in human things.
Their background.
Their gifts.
Their success.
“I too will boast.”
Paul will match them, but in a surprising way.
He will show that he could boast in the same things.
Then he will boast in things they would never boast about.

Cross References

Philippians 3:4
If anyone thinks they have reasons to trust in human things, I have even more.
Galatians 6:13
Even those who are circumcised do not keep the law. They want you circumcised so they can brag about your flesh.
Jeremiah 9:23
The Lord says, “Wise people should not brag about their wisdom. Strong people should not brag about their strength. Rich people should not brag about their riches.”

Spiritual Principle

Human credentials are nothing to boast about before God.

Key Truth

What impresses people often means little to God.

XIX. SO WISE

2 Corinthians 11:19 — Putting Up with Fools

“You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise!”
Paul uses sharp irony.

The Corinthians thought they were wise.
Yet they gladly put up with the foolish false teachers.
So surely they could put up with Paul's “foolishness” too.
Paul is trying to wake them up.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:10
We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong!
Job 12:2
Job said, “You really think you are the only wise people, and wisdom will die with you!”
Proverbs 26:5
Answer a fool the way his foolishness deserves, or he will think he is wise.

Spiritual Principle

Pride in our own wisdom can make us blind to deception.

Spiritual Warning

The people most sure of their wisdom are often the easiest to fool.

XX. ENSLAVED AND EXPLOITED

2 Corinthians 11:20 — What They Put Up With

“In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you, exploits you, takes advantage of you, exalts himself, or strikes you in the face.”
Paul describes how the false teachers treated the church.
“Enslaves you.”
They brought people under their control.
“Exploits you.”
They used people for their own gain.
“Takes advantage of you.”
They took what they could.
“Exalts himself.”
They acted superior.
“Strikes you in the face.”
They insulted and humiliated people.
Strangely, the Corinthians accepted it.
Sometimes people mistake harshness and control for strength and authority.

Cross References

Galatians 4:9
Now that you know God, or rather are known by God, why do you want to go back to those weak and worthless rules and be their slaves again?
Galatians 2:4
Some false believers sneaked in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to make us slaves.

Isaiah 50:6
I let them beat my back and pull out my beard. I did not hide my face from insults and spitting.

Spiritual Principle

Controlling and abusive leadership is a sign of a false shepherd.

Spiritual Warning

Do not mistake control and harshness for spiritual authority.

XXI. TOO WEAK FOR THAT

2 Corinthians 11:21 — Daring to Boast

“To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! Yet whatever anyone else dares to boast about —I speak as a fool—I also dare to boast.”
“To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!”
This is irony.
Paul says he was “too weak” to treat them the way the false teachers did.
He would never abuse them.
“Yet whatever anyone else dares to boast about... I also dare to boast.”
Now Paul begins his “foolish” boasting.
If others want to compare credentials, Paul can do that too.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:1
Please put up with a little foolishness from me. Yes, bear with me.
2 Corinthians 12:11
I have become a fool, but you drove me to it.
1 Corinthians 4:10
We are weak, but you are strong. You are honored, but we are looked down on.

Spiritual Principle

Gentleness that refuses to abuse is not weakness.

Key Truth

The true shepherd would rather be called weak than harm the flock.

XXII. HEBREWS, ISRAELITES, AND ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN

2 Corinthians 11:22 — So Am I

“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”
The false teachers apparently boasted of their Jewish background.

Paul says he shares the same heritage.
“Hebrews.”
Paul was Hebrew by birth and language.
“Israelites.”
He belonged to God's covenant people.
“Descendants of Abraham.”
He was part of the family of promise.
Paul honored his heritage.
But he did not trust in it for salvation or for his standing as an apostle.

Cross References

Philippians 3:5
> I was circumcised on the eighth day. I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews. As for the law, I was a Pharisee.

Romans 11:1
> Has God turned His back on His people? Not at all! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin.

Acts 22:3
> I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but raised in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was trained carefully in the law of our ancestors.

Spiritual Principle

Our standing with God rests on Christ, not on our background.

Key Truth

Heritage can be a blessing, but it is never a substitute for faithfulness.

XXIII. SERVANTS OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 11:23 — I Am More So

“Are they servants of Christ? (I am speaking like a madman) I am more so: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.”
“Are they servants of Christ?”
This was the real question.
“I am speaking like a madman.”
Paul knows how strange this sounds.
“I am more so.”
Here is the surprise.
Paul does not list his achievements.
He lists his sufferings.
“Far greater labors.”
He worked harder.
“Far more imprisonments.”
He had been in prison many times.
“Countless beatings.”
He had been beaten more times than he could count.

“Often near death.”
His life had been in danger again and again.
This was the proof of his service.

Cross References

Acts 9:16
I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.
1 Corinthians 15:10
I worked harder than any of them, though it was not really me, but God's grace that was with me.
Acts 16:23
After they were beaten many times, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was ordered to guard them carefully.

Spiritual Principle

A true servant of Christ is proven by faithful suffering, not impressive success.

Key Truth

The world lists achievements; Paul listed scars.

XXIV. FORTY LASHES MINUS ONE

2 Corinthians 11:24 — Five Times

“Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one.”
This was a punishment given in the synagogue.
The law of Moses limited a beating to forty lashes.
To make sure they never went over the limit, they stopped at thirty-nine.
Paul received this five times.
That is 195 lashes.
The synagogue leaders saw Paul as a lawbreaker because he preached Jesus as Messiah.
Paul was himself Jewish, and he loved his people deeply.
Even after this pain, he kept going to the synagogues first and longed for his people to be saved.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 25:3
The guilty person may be given up to forty lashes, but no more. If he is beaten more than that, your fellow Israelite would be shamed in front of you.
Acts 5:40
They called the apostles in and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.
Matthew 10:17
Be careful of people. They will hand you over to the courts and whip you in their synagogues.

Spiritual Principle

Love for people can continue even when those people cause us pain.

Application

Can you keep loving those who have hurt you?

XXV. RODS, STONES, AND SHIPWRECKS

2 Corinthians 11:25 — Adrift at Sea

“Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent adrift at sea.”
“Three times I was beaten with rods.”
This was a Roman punishment.
It happened at Philippi and at other times.
“Once I was stoned.”
At Lystra, a crowd stoned Paul and left him for dead.
“Three times I was shipwrecked.”
These were before the famous shipwreck on the way to Rome, which came later.
“A night and a day I have spent adrift at sea.”
Paul spent twenty-four hours in the open water.
Many of these events are not recorded in Acts.
Paul's life was far harder than we often realize.

Cross References

Acts 16:22
> The crowd joined in the attack, and the officials tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten with rods.

Acts 14:19
> Some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and turned the crowd against Paul. They threw stones at him and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead.

Acts 27:41
> The ship hit a sandbar and stuck fast. The front would not move, and the back was being broken apart by the waves.

Spiritual Principle

God sustains His servants through dangers we may never fully know.

Key Truth

Paul's faith was not tested once; it was tested again and again.

XXVI. DANGERS ON EVERY SIDE

2 Corinthians 11:26 — Frequent Journeys

“I have been on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger at sea, and in danger among false brothers.”
Paul traveled thousands of miles, mostly on foot.

Danger was everywhere.

- Rivers that flooded.
- Robbers on the roads.
- His own people who opposed him.
- Gentiles who attacked him.
- Cities with angry crowds.
- The empty wilderness.
- The open sea.
- False brothers inside the church.

Notice the last one.
Some of Paul's greatest pain came from people who claimed to be believers.

Cross References

Acts 9:23
After many days, some Jews planned together to kill Paul.
Acts 14:5
A group of Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, planned to mistreat them and stone them.
Acts 20:3
Paul stayed in Greece three months. When he was about to sail to Syria, some Jews made a plot against him, so he decided to go back through Macedonia.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful service may bring danger from every direction, even from within the church.

Application

Are you willing to follow Christ when it is costly?

XXVII. TOIL AND HARDSHIP

2 Corinthians 11:27 — Hunger, Thirst, and Cold

“In toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”
Paul now lists everyday hardships.
“In toil and hardship.”
He worked hard with his hands and in ministry.
“Through many sleepless nights.”
He often went without sleep.
“In hunger and thirst, often without food.”
He went without meals.
“In cold and exposure.”
He did not always have enough clothing or shelter.
This was the life of a great apostle.
Not comfort and honor, but hardship and sacrifice.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:11
Even now we are hungry and thirsty. We do not have enough clothes. We are beaten, and we have no home.
Philippians 4:12
I have lived with very little, and I have lived with a lot. Whether my stomach is full or empty, whether I have plenty or nothing, I have learned how to be at peace.
Acts 20:31
So be on guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you, night and day, with tears.

Spiritual Principle

Following Christ may cost us comfort, but He is worth it.

Key Truth

The Christian life involves real cost.

XXVIII. CARE FOR ALL THE CHURCHES

2 Corinthians 11:28 — Daily Pressure

“And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”
“Apart from other things.”
Paul could have listed even more.
“There is the daily pressure on me.”
Every day he felt a heavy weight.
“Of my anxiety for all the churches.”
He cared deeply for every church he had planted.
He worried about false teachers.
He prayed for their growth.
He grieved over their sin.
For Paul, this inner burden was as real as the beatings.

Cross References

Colossians 2:1
I want you to know how hard I am working for you, for the believers in Laodicea, and for all who have never met me in person.
2 Corinthians 2:4
I wrote to you with deep sadness and many tears. I did not want to hurt you, but to show you how much I love you.
Galatians 4:19
My dear children, I am going through the pain of childbirth for you again until Christ is formed in you.

Spiritual Principle

True shepherds carry God's people on their hearts every day.

Application

Who has God placed on your heart to pray for daily?

XXIX. WEAK WITH THE WEAK

2 Corinthians 11:29 — Burning with Indignation

“Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?”
“Who is weak, and I am not weak?”
Paul felt what other believers felt.
When someone struggled, Paul struggled with them.
“Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?”
When someone was led into sin, Paul burned inside.
He was angry at whatever caused them to fall.
Paul's love was not distant.
He shared in the pain of God's people.

Cross References

Romans 14:21
It is better not to eat meat, drink wine, or do anything else that makes your brother or sister fall.
1 Corinthians 8:13
If what I eat makes my brother sin, I will never eat meat again, so I will not cause him to fall.
1 Corinthians 9:22
With people who were weak, I became weak, to win them. I have fit in with every kind of person, using every way I can to save some of them.

Spiritual Principle

Christlike love feels the struggles of others as its own.

Key Truth

A shepherd's heart hurts when the sheep are hurt.

XXX. BOASTING IN WEAKNESS

2 Corinthians 11:30 — Things That Show My Weakness

“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”
Here is the turning point.
The false teachers boasted of strength.
Paul boasts of weakness.
Why?
Because his weakness shows that the power comes from God.
When a weak man accomplishes great things, God gets the glory.
This prepares for Chapter 12.
There God will tell Paul, **“My power is made perfect in weakness.”**

Cross References

2 Corinthians 12:9
> But the Lord answered me, “My kindness to you is enough. My strength shows up most clearly in your weakness.” So I am glad to talk about my weaknesses, so the power of Christ can stay on me.

2 Corinthians 12:5
> I will brag about a man like that, but I will not brag about myself except about my weaknesses.

1 Corinthians 1:27
> God picked the things the world calls foolish to put the wise to shame, and He picked the things the world calls weak to put the powerful to shame.

Spiritual Principle

Our weaknesses display God's strength.

Key Truth

God gets the most glory when His strength works through our weakness.

XXXI. GOD KNOWS I AM NOT LYING

2 Corinthians 11:31 — Blessed Forever

“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.”
Paul's list sounds almost unbelievable.
So he calls on God as his witness.
“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus.”
Paul names God in His relationship to Jesus.
“Who is blessed forever.”
In the middle of his defense, Paul praises God.
“Knows that I am not lying.”
Everything Paul said was true.

Cross References

Romans 1:9
> God, whom I serve with all my heart by preaching about His Son, is my witness that I always pray for you.

Galatians 1:20
> I promise you before God that what I am writing to you is true. I am not lying.

Romans 9:5
> The patriarchs belong to them, and from their family line came the Messiah as a human being. He is God over all, praised forever. Amen.

Spiritual Principle

Live so that you can call God as your witness.

Application

Could God confirm everything you say about yourself?

XXXII. DANGER IN DAMASCUS

2 Corinthians 11:32 — King Aretas

“In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city guarded in order to arrest me.”
Paul now tells a story from the very beginning of his Christian life.
Soon after his conversion, he preached Christ in Damascus.
His enemies wanted to kill him.
“The governor under King Aretas.”
Aretas was a king of the Nabateans, a people of Arabia.
“Had the city guarded in order to arrest me.”
The gates were watched day and night.
Paul was trapped.

Cross References

Acts 9:23
> After many days had passed, the Jews made plans to kill Saul.

Acts 9:24
> But Saul found out about their plan. They were watching the city gates day and night so they could kill him.

Galatians 1:17
> I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me. Instead, I went to Arabia and later went back to Damascus.

Spiritual Principle

Opposition often comes early to those who follow Christ boldly.

Key Truth

From the first days of his faith, Paul faced danger for Christ.

XXXIII. LOWERED IN A BASKET

2 Corinthians 11:33 — Escaping His Hands

“But I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.”
What a strange way to end a list of credentials.
In the Roman world, the first soldier to climb over an enemy wall received a special honor.
Paul tells about going down a wall, not up.
He was lowered in a basket like a load of goods.
He escaped in the dark.
It was a humbling moment.
But that is exactly Paul's point.
He boasts in weakness.
He did not escape by his own strength.
God rescued him through the help of others.

Cross References

Acts 9:25
But his followers took him one night and let him down through an opening in the city wall, lowering him in a large basket.
Joshua 2:15
Rahab's house was built into the city wall, so she let the spies down by a rope through her window.
1 Samuel 19:12
Michal let David down through a window, and he ran away and escaped.

Spiritual Principle

God's greatest servants often have humbling stories of rescue.

Key Truth

Paul's “greatest” credential was a basket and a rope, because it showed God's power, not his own.

XXXIV. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 11

1. Spiritual Faithfulness Matters

“To present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

Principle:

Just as Eve was deceived, believers must guard against corruption and cling to Christ alone.

2. Beware of False Teachers

“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

Principle:

Not everyone who claims to serve Christ truly does.

3. True Apostleship Is Proven in Suffering, Not Boasting

“Are they servants of Christ? I am more so.”

Principle:

Paul's hardships confirm that he was truly Christ's servant.

4. The Christian Life Involves Cost

“In toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights.”

Principle:

Paul endured danger, hunger, beatings, and persecution, yet remained steadfast.

5. Boasting Belongs in Weakness

“I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”

Principle:

Our trials show God's strength and faithfulness more than our successes do.

XXXV. HOW TO RECOGNIZE FALSE TEACHERS

Verses 3–20 give warning signs.

They Lead Minds Away from Simple Devotion to Christ

“Led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion.”

They Preach Another Jesus

“Another Jesus... a different spirit... a different gospel.”

They Promote Themselves

“Super-apostles.”

They Measure Success by Impressive Appearance

They looked down on Paul's plain speech.

They Use Ministry for Gain

Paul's free preaching exposed their love of money.

They Wear a Disguise

“Disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”

They Control and Exploit

“Enslaves you, exploits you, takes advantage of you.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Test every teacher by the true Jesus, the true gospel, and the fruit of their lives.

XXXVI. PAUL'S CATALOG OF SUFFERING

Verses 23–29 list what Paul endured for Christ.

Physical Punishment

- Countless beatings.

- Five times thirty-nine lashes.
- Three times beaten with rods.
- Once stoned.
- Many imprisonments.

Dangers of Travel

- Three shipwrecks.
- A night and a day adrift at sea.
- Danger from rivers and robbers.
- Danger in the city, the wilderness, and the sea.

Dangers from People

- From his own people.
- From Gentiles.
- From false brothers.

Daily Hardships

- Toil and hard work.
- Sleepless nights.
- Hunger and thirst.
- Cold and lack of clothing.

The Inner Burden

- Daily concern for all the churches.
- Feeling the weakness of others.
- Burning over those led into sin.

Key Truth

Paul's credentials were not written on paper; they were written on his body and his heart.

XXXVII. TWO KINDS OF BOASTING

This chapter contrasts the false apostles with Paul.

The False Apostles Boasted In

- Their speaking ability.
- Their background.
- Their authority over others.
- Their impressive appearance.
- Their strength.

Paul Boasted In

- His sufferings for Christ.
- His service without pay.

- His care for the churches.
- His weakness.
- His humbling escape in a basket.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The world boasts of strength; the Christian boasts of the grace that holds him up in weakness.

XXXVIII. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 11 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

He Is the Bridegroom of the Church

“I promised you in marriage to one husband... to Christ.”

He Deserves Pure Devotion

“The simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

There Is Only One True Jesus

“If someone comes and proclaims another Jesus.”

His Truth Lives in His Servants

“As surely as the truth of Christ is in me.”

His Servants Suffer for Him

“Are they servants of Christ? I am more so.”

His Father Is Blessed Forever

“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jesus is the only Bridegroom of the church, and He deserves a bride who loves Him with a simple and pure heart.

XXXIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why does Paul call his boasting “foolishness”?
Because boasting about himself went against the way of Christ, but he did it to protect the church.

Question 2

What is “godly jealousy”?
A protective love that wants God's people to belong fully to Christ.

Question 3

How did the serpent deceive Eve?
By cunning words that twisted God's word and made sin look good.

Question 4

What does “another Jesus” mean?
A Jesus who is described in a way that is different from the true Jesus of the gospel.

Question 5

Who were the “super-apostles”?
Self-promoting false teachers who had come into the Corinthian church.

Question 6

Why did Paul preach in Corinth without pay?
So no one could accuse him of greed, and so the gospel would cost them nothing.

Question 7

What does it mean that Satan masquerades as an angel of light?
He disguises evil to look good, wise, and attractive.

Question 8

How did the false teachers treat the Corinthians?
They controlled them, used them, took advantage of them, acted superior, and insulted them.

Question 9

What did Paul boast about instead of achievements?
His sufferings, hardships, and weakness for Christ.

Question 10

What was Paul's daily inner burden?
His concern and care for all the churches.

Question 11

Why does Paul end with the basket story?
It was a humbling moment that showed God's rescue, not Paul's strength.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 11 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 11 should cause believers to live:

- Keeping a simple and pure devotion to Christ.
- Testing every teaching by the true gospel.
- Not being dazzled by impressive self-promoters.
- Recognizing that Satan disguises evil as good.
- Serving without selfish gain.
- Being willing to pay a price for following Christ.
- Carrying others on their hearts in prayer.
- Boasting in God's strength, not their own.

XL. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 11 asks several important questions.

Is My Devotion to Christ Simple and Pure?

Or has something else crept in?

Am I Testing What I Hear?

Do I compare it with God's word?

Am I Impressed by the Wrong Things?

Do I follow people because of charm or because of truth?

Can I Recognize Disguised Evil?

Am I alert to lies that look like light?

What Am I Willing to Suffer for Christ?

Or do I avoid anything costly?

Do I Carry Others on My Heart?

Who am I praying for every day?

Do I Feel the Struggles of Others?

Or am I distant from their pain?

What Do I Boast About?

My strengths, or God's grace in my weakness?

XLI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Scars, Not Trophies”

Most people keep trophies.
Certificates on the wall.
Awards on the shelf.
Titles before their names.
These things show what they have achieved.
The false teachers in Corinth had trophies.
Polished speech.
Impressive backgrounds.
Confidence and control.
Paul had scars.
Marks from whips.
Bruises from rods.
Memories of stones, storms, and sleepless nights.
And a story about a basket on a rope.
The world would choose the trophies.
But Paul's scars told the truth about whom he served.
They showed that he loved Christ more than comfort.
They showed that he loved the church more than his own safety.
And they showed that God's power had carried him through.
This creates a powerful principle.
Do not judge a servant of Christ by his trophies.
Look for the marks of faithful love.

Principle:

The true marks of a servant of Christ are not trophies of success but scars of faithfulness.

XLII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 11 is a warning and an encouragement.
It warns us about deception.
It reminds us that Satan comes disguised as light.
It calls us to a simple, pure devotion to Christ.
It shows us what a true servant looks like.
And it shows that weakness can display God's power.
2 Corinthians 11 therefore reminds us:
Never let your heart drift from simple devotion to Christ.
Never accept another Jesus or another gospel.
Never judge by outward appearance.
Never be surprised when evil looks good.
Never be ashamed of weakness that shows God's strength.
The church does not need self-promoting leaders.

It needs:
Servants with pure devotion.
Leaders who protect the flock.
Believers who will pay the price.
And hearts that boast only in God's grace.
The same Lord still calls:
Tell people about the true Jesus.
Tell people the true gospel.
Tell people that Christ is worth any cost.
Tell people that God's strength shines in our weakness.
And as you live:
Stay devoted to Christ.
Test every message.
Endure for His sake.
Boast in your weakness and His strength.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for Jesus Christ, the true Bridegroom of the church.
Thank You for calling us to a simple and pure devotion to Him.
Thank You for faithful servants like Paul who suffered so the gospel could reach us.
Thank You that You see through every disguise.
Thank You that Your strength is shown in our weakness.
Thank You that You rescue Your servants in ways we could never plan.
Forgive us when our hearts have drifted from Christ.
Forgive us when we have been impressed by the wrong things.
Forgive us when we have tolerated what is false.
Forgive us when we have avoided the cost of following You.
Forgive us when we have boasted in ourselves.
Guard our minds from deception.
Help us test every teaching by Your word.
Give us courage to endure hardship for Christ.
Give us hearts that carry Your people in prayer.
And teach us to boast only in what shows Your strength.
“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But I am afraid that, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” — 2 Corinthians 11:3

Central Truth

True servants of Christ guard the church's pure devotion to Him, expose deception that comes disguised as light, and are proven not by impressive boasting but by faithful suffering and weakness through which God's strength is shown.

2 Corinthians 11 in One Sentence

Paul, jealous for the church's pure devotion to Christ, exposes the false apostles who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness just as Satan masquerades as an angel of light, and then "foolishly" boasts not in impressive achievements but in his many sufferings, his care for the churches, and his weakness.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 12 — Visions, Weakness, and Apostolic Proof

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 12 continues Paul's "foolish" boasting.
In Chapter 11, he boasted about his sufferings.
Now he tells about something far more amazing.
Fourteen years earlier, he was caught up into Paradise.
He heard things too sacred to be spoken.
The false teachers in Corinth loved to talk about visions and spiritual experiences.
Paul could have boasted about this for years.
But he did not.
He even tells it as if it happened to someone else.
Then he tells the rest of the story.
God gave him a **"thorn in the flesh"** to keep him humble.
Paul begged God three times to take it away.
God said no.
But He gave Paul something better.
"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

This changed everything for Paul.
He learned to be glad in his weaknesses.
“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
Then Paul gives the marks of a true apostle.
He reminds them that he never took their money.
He loves them like a parent loves a child.
“I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.”
Finally, Paul expresses his fear.
He is coming for a third visit.
He fears he may find quarreling, pride, and unrepented sin.
He longs for them to repent before he arrives.
The chapter moves through five movements:

- Paul's Vision of Paradise (verses 1–5).
- Paul's Thorn in the Flesh (verses 6–10).
- Paul's Apostolic Credentials (verses 11–13).
- Paul's Concern for the Corinthians (verses 14–18).
- Warning of Paul's Coming Visit (verses 19–21).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 12 is:
God keeps His servants humble through weakness, gives them grace that is always enough, shows His power most clearly when they are weak, and fills them with sacrificial love that seeks the good and repentance of His people.

I. VISIONS AND REVELATIONS

2 Corinthians 12:1 — Not Beneficial to Boast

“It is not beneficial for me to boast, yet I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.”
“It is not beneficial for me to boast.”
Paul knew boasting did no real good.
It did not help him spiritually.
It did not build up the church.
“Yet I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.”
But the false teachers were boasting about their spiritual experiences.
So Paul reluctantly speaks about his own.
Notice the words **“from the Lord.”**
These visions did not come from Paul's imagination.
They were given by God.

Cross References

Ezekiel 1:1
When I was living among the captives by the Kebar River, the skies opened, and I saw visions of God.
Acts 26:19
So, King Agrippa, I did not disobey the vision that came to me from heaven.
Galatians 1:12
No person gave me this message, and no one taught it to me. Jesus Christ Himself showed it to me.

Spiritual Principle

Even real spiritual experiences are not something to boast about.

Key Truth

The gifts God gives are reasons to praise Him, not to praise ourselves.

II. CAUGHT UP TO THE THIRD HEAVEN

2 Corinthians 12:2 — A Man in Christ

“I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago—whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows—was caught up to the third heaven.”
“I know a man in Christ.”
Paul speaks as if this happened to someone else.
But verse 7 makes it clear he is speaking about himself.
He uses this humble way of speaking so as not to draw attention to himself.
“Fourteen years ago.”
Paul had kept this experience to himself for fourteen years.
He did not use it to build his reputation.
“Whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows.”
Paul did not even know exactly how it happened.
He was honest about what he did not understand.
“Was caught up to the third heaven.”
The **first heaven** was often understood as the sky.
The **second** as the place of the stars.
The **third heaven** meant the very presence of God.

Cross References

Acts 22:17
> When I went back to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance.

Ezekiel 8:3
> He reached out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair. The Spirit lifted me up between earth and sky and, in visions from God, carried me to Jerusalem.

Revelation 4:1
> After this I looked, and there in heaven was an open door. The voice I had heard before, which sounded like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.”

Spiritual Principle

True spiritual experiences produce humility, not self-promotion.

Key Truth

Paul kept silent for fourteen years about the greatest experience of his life.

III. GOD KNOWS

2 Corinthians 12:3 — In the Body or Out

“And I know that this man—whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows —”

Paul repeats himself.
He wants to be clear and honest.
He knew the experience was real.
But he did not know the details of how it happened.
Some things only God knows.
Paul was content to leave it there.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 15:44
> The body is planted as a natural body, but it is raised as a spiritual body. Just as there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Ezekiel 3:12
> Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me saying, “Praise the glory of the Lord in His place!”

Revelation 1:10
> On the Lord's Day the Spirit took control of me, and I heard a loud voice behind me that sounded like a trumpet.

Spiritual Principle

It is wise to be honest about what we do not know.

Key Truth

Faith does not need every answer; it rests in the God who knows.

IV. CAUGHT UP INTO PARADISE

2 Corinthians 12:4 — Inexpressible Things

“was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no human is permitted to speak.”

“Was caught up into Paradise.”
Paradise is another name for the place where God dwells with His people.
Jesus promised the thief on the cross that he would be with Him in Paradise.
“And heard inexpressible things.”
What Paul heard was beyond human words.
“Things that no human is permitted to speak.”
God did not allow Paul to share them.
This is very different from the false teachers.
They loved to talk about their experiences.
Paul's greatest experience was one he was not even allowed to describe.

Cross References

Luke 23:43
Jesus answered him, “I promise you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”
Revelation 2:7
Anyone who has ears should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who wins the victory, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life in God's Paradise.
1 Corinthians 2:9
The Scriptures tell us that nobody has ever seen, heard, or even dreamed up the things God has made ready for those who love Him.

Spiritual Principle

Heaven is more wonderful than words can express.

Application

Does the hope of heaven fill your heart with joy?

V. ONLY IN MY WEAKNESSES

2 Corinthians 12:5 — Boasting About Such a Man

“About such a man I will boast, but about myself I will not boast, except in my weaknesses.”
“About such a man I will boast.”
Paul could speak about what God did for “that man.”
The experience was God's gift, not Paul's achievement.
“But about myself I will not boast, except in my weaknesses.”
When it comes to himself, Paul will only boast in weakness.
Weakness points to God's power.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:30
If I have to brag, I will brag about the things that show how weak I am.
Galatians 6:14
The only thing I will ever brag about is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.
1 Corinthians 1:31
As the Scriptures say, “Whoever brags should brag only about the Lord.”

Spiritual Principle

God's gifts are His glory; our weaknesses show His power.

Key Truth

Paul would rather point to his weakness than to his visions.

VI. SPEAKING THE TRUTH

2 Corinthians 12:6 — Holding Back

“Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so that no one will think more of me than what is seen in me or heard from me.”
“Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool.”
Paul could say much more.
“Because I would be speaking the truth.”
Everything he said would be true.
“But I refrain.”
Still, he holds back.
“So that no one will think more of me than what is seen in me or heard from me.”
Paul wanted people to judge him by his life and his message.
Not by stories of private experiences that no one could check.

Cross References

Proverbs 27:2
> Let other people praise you, not your own mouth. Let strangers do it, not your own lips.

John 8:14
> Jesus answered, “Even if I speak about Myself, what I say is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going.”

Ephesians 4:25
> So stop lying. Each of you must tell the truth to your neighbor, because we all belong to the same body.

Spiritual Principle

Let people judge you by your life, not your claims.

Application

Does your everyday life match what you say about your faith?

VII. A THORN IN THE FLESH

2 Corinthians 12:7 — To Keep Me Humble

“To keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me.”
“To keep me from becoming conceited.”
Here is the purpose.
God knew the danger of pride.
Great experiences can lead to a big ego.
“Because of the surpassingly great revelations.”
Paul had been shown amazing things.
“There was given me a thorn in the flesh.”
A **thorn** is something sharp that causes constant pain.

Bible students have long discussed what it was.
Some think it was a physical illness, perhaps a problem with his eyes.
Some think it was a speech difficulty.
Some think it was the persecution or opponents that followed him everywhere.
Paul does not tell us.
Perhaps that is so that all believers can apply it to their own struggles.
“A messenger of Satan to torment me.”
Satan meant it for harm.
But God allowed it and used it for good.
It kept Paul humble and dependent on God.

Cross References

Job 2:6
The Lord said to Satan, “All right, he is in your power, but you must not take his life.”
Numbers 33:55
If you do not drive out the people living in the land, those you allow to stay will be like thorns in your eyes and sharp points in your sides.
Galatians 4:13
You know it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.

Spiritual Principle

God can use what Satan means for harm to keep us humble and close to Him.

Key Truth

Sometimes God allows a thorn to protect us from the greater danger of pride.

VIII. THREE TIMES I PLEADED

2 Corinthians 12:8 — Take It Away

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.”
Paul prayed earnestly.
He did not pray once and give up.
He pleaded three times.
This reminds us of Jesus in Gethsemane.
Jesus also prayed three times for the cup to pass.
Both received the answer that God's will was best.
It is right to ask God to remove our pain.
But we must also trust Him when He says no.

Cross References

Matthew 26:39
Jesus walked on a short distance, bowed down to the ground, and prayed, “Father, if there is any other way, take this suffering from Me. Still, I want what You want, not what I want.”
Matthew 26:44
So He left them again and went away to pray a third time, saying the same words.

Psalm 34:4

I went to the Lord for help, and He answered me. He rescued me from everything I was afraid of.

Spiritual Principle

It is right to ask God for relief, and right to trust Him when He answers differently.

Application

Can you trust God even when He does not take your pain away?

IX. MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

2 Corinthians 12:9 — Power in Weakness

“But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

This is one of the most precious verses in the Bible.

“But He said to me.”

God answered Paul's prayer.

Not with a yes, but with a promise.

“My grace is sufficient for you.”

Sufficient means enough.

God's grace would be enough for Paul.

Enough for every day.

Enough for every pain.

Enough for every weakness.

“For my power is made perfect in weakness.”

God's power is shown most fully when we are weak.

When we cannot, He can.

“Therefore, I will most gladly boast in my weaknesses.”

Paul's attitude changed.

He no longer resented his weakness.

“So that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

The word **rest** suggests a tent spread over him.

Christ's power would cover him like a shelter.

Cross References

Isaiah 40:29

When people are worn out, the Lord makes them strong again. When they have no strength left, He fills them with power.

1 Corinthians 1:27

God chose the things the world sees as foolish to embarrass the wise, and the things it sees as weak to embarrass the strong.

Philippians 4:13

Christ gives me the strength I need to face anything.

Spiritual Principle

God's grace is always enough, and His power shines brightest in our weakness.

Key Truth

God did not remove the thorn; He gave grace greater than the thorn.

X. WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I AM STRONG

2 Corinthians 12:10 — Delighting in Weakness

“For the sake of Christ, then, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, and in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
“For the sake of Christ.”
This is the key.
Paul did not love pain for its own sake.
He accepted it for Christ.
“I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, and in difficulties.”
Paul lists five kinds of trouble.
He does not just put up with them.
He finds joy in them, because they bring Christ's power.
“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
This is the great Christian paradox.
When we admit our weakness, we lean on God.
When we lean on God, His strength becomes ours.

Cross References

James 1:2
Brothers and sisters, when trouble of any kind comes your way, see it as a chance for real joy.
1 Peter 4:13
Be glad that you share in Christ's sufferings, so that you will be full of joy when His glory is shown.
Romans 5:3
We can even be glad when hard times come, because hard times build in us the strength to keep going.

Spiritual Principle

True strength is found in depending on Christ.

Application

What weakness do you need to hand over to Christ today?

XI. COMPELLED TO BE A FOOL

2 Corinthians 12:11 — Not Inferior

“I have been a fool, but you compelled me. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am in no way inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing.”

“I have been a fool, but you compelled me.”
Paul finishes his boasting.
He did not want to do it.
The Corinthians forced him by listening to the false teachers.
“I ought to have been commended by you.”
They should have defended him.
They knew him best.
“I am in no way inferior to the super-apostles.”
Paul was equal to anyone in his calling.
“Even though I am nothing.”
Yet he humbly admits that in himself, he is nothing.
Everything he is comes from God's grace.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:5
I do not think I am any less than those so-called super-apostles.
1 Corinthians 15:9
I am the least of the apostles. I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I attacked God's church.
1 Corinthians 15:10
Whatever I am now, God's grace made me. His grace in me was not wasted.

Spiritual Principle

God's servants can be confident in their calling and humble about themselves.

Key Truth

Confidence in God's call and humility about ourselves belong together.

XII. THE MARKS OF A TRUE APOSTLE

2 Corinthians 12:12 — Signs, Wonders, and Mighty Works

“The marks of a true apostle—signs, wonders, and mighty works—were performed among you with great perseverance.”
“The marks of a true apostle.”
Paul reminds them of the evidence they had already seen.
“Signs, wonders, and mighty works.”
God had done miracles through Paul in Corinth.
These confirmed his message.
“Were performed among you.”
They had seen it with their own eyes.
“With great perseverance.”
Paul's patient endurance through hardship was also a mark of his calling.
Notice that Paul does not say “I performed.”
He says they **“were performed.”**
God was the One doing the work.

Cross References

Romans 15:19
Christ worked through me by the power of signs and miracles and by the power of the Spirit. So I have fully preached the good news of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum.
Acts 5:12
The apostles did many miracles and wonders among the people.
Hebrews 2:4
God also confirmed the message by signs, wonders, many kinds of miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit given out as He chose.

Spiritual Principle

God confirms the ministry of His true servants.

Key Truth

The mark of a true servant is God's power working through faithful endurance.

XIII. FORGIVE ME THIS WRONG

2 Corinthians 12:13 — Never a Burden

“How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!”
“How were you inferior to the other churches?”
The Corinthians had received everything other churches received.
“Except that I was never a burden to you.”
The only difference was that Paul never took their money.
“Forgive me this wrong!”
This is gentle sarcasm.
Was it really a sin to serve them for free?
Paul uses humor to show how unfair their complaint was.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:9
When I was with you and needed something, I did not ask any of you for help.
2 Corinthians 12:16
However it may be, I was never a burden to you.
1 Corinthians 9:12
We have not used this right. We would rather put up with anything than put something in the way of the gospel of Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Generous service should never be held against a servant of God.

Key Truth

Sometimes love is misunderstood, even when it gives the most.

XIV. NOT YOURS, BUT YOU

2 Corinthians 12:14 — A Parent's Love

“Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because I seek not your possessions but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.”
“Now I am ready to visit you for the third time.”
Paul was planning another visit.
“I will not be a burden to you.”
He would still not take their money.
“Because I seek not your possessions but you.”
This is the heart of true ministry.
Paul did not want what they had.
He wanted them.
Their hearts, their faith, their good.
“For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.”
Paul was their spiritual father.
Parents provide for their children, not the other way around.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 13:1
This will be my third visit to you. As the Scriptures say, “Every matter must be proven by two or three witnesses.”
Acts 20:33
I never wanted anyone's silver, gold, or clothing.
Proverbs 19:14
Houses and riches can be passed down from parents, but a wise wife is a gift from the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

True ministry seeks people, not possessions.

Application

Do you love people for who they are or for what they can give you?

XV. SPEND AND BE SPENT

2 Corinthians 12:15 — For Your Souls

“I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?”
“I will most gladly spend.”
Paul would spend his time, money, and energy.
“And be spent.”
He would even let himself be completely used up.
“For your souls.”
Their spiritual good was his goal.

“If I love you more, am I to be loved less?”
This is a painful question.
The more Paul loved them, the less they seemed to love him.
Yet he kept loving.

Cross References

Philippians 2:17
Even if my life is poured out like a drink offering on top of the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad, and I share my joy with all of you.
1 Thessalonians 2:8
We cared for you so much that we were happy to share with you not only God's good news but also our own lives, because you had become so dear to us.
John 15:13
The highest kind of love is shown when a person dies to save his friends.

Spiritual Principle

Christlike love keeps giving even when it is not returned.

Key Truth

Real love does not keep score.

XVI. CRAFTY?

2 Corinthians 12:16 — The Accusation

“Be that as it may, I did not burden you. But some say, “Being crafty, I caught you by trickery.””
“Be that as it may, I did not burden you.”
Paul states the facts.
“But some say, ‘Being crafty, I caught you by trickery.’”
His critics had a new accusation.
They admitted Paul did not take money directly.
But they suggested he was secretly taking money through the collection for Jerusalem.
Paul repeats the accusation so he can answer it.

Cross References

1 Thessalonians 2:5
You know we never used flattery, and we never pretended so we could get money. God is our witness.
2 Corinthians 4:2
We have refused to use shameful, secret ways. We do not use tricks, and we do not twist God's word.
Genesis 27:35
Isaac said, “Your brother came and tricked me, and he took your blessing.”

Spiritual Principle

Faithful servants may be falsely accused, but truth will stand.

Key Truth

A clear conscience is the best answer to false accusations.

XVII. DID I EXPLOIT YOU?

2 Corinthians 12:17 — Through the Men I Sent

“Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you?”
Paul asks a simple question.
Had any of his messengers taken advantage of them?
The answer was obviously no.
Paul invites them to examine the facts.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 7:2
Make room for us in your hearts. We have not hurt anyone, ruined anyone, or cheated anyone.
1 Samuel 12:3
Here I am. Tell me in front of the Lord: Whose ox or donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated or mistreated? Whose bribe have I accepted?
Acts 20:33
I have not wanted anyone's money or nice clothes.

Spiritual Principle

An honest servant can invite others to examine his conduct.

Application

Could your life stand up to an honest examination?

XVIII. THE SAME SPIRIT, THE SAME STEPS

2 Corinthians 12:18 — Titus and the Brother

“I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Did Titus exploit you? Did we not walk in the same spirit, and follow the same steps?”
“I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him.”
Paul reminds them of the men who came to help with the offering.
“Did Titus exploit you?”
They knew Titus had not.
“Did we not walk in the same spirit, and follow the same steps?”
Paul and Titus lived the same way.
They had the same attitude and the same conduct.
Titus followed in Paul's footsteps of integrity.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 8:6
So we asked Titus to help you finish this special act of kindness, since he was the one who started it.
2 Corinthians 8:18
With him we are sending the brother who is praised by all the churches for his work in the gospel.
Galatians 2:1
Fourteen years later I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, and I also took Titus with me.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful leaders raise up others who walk in the same integrity.

Key Truth

Integrity is shown by those who follow in our steps.

XIX. FOR YOUR STRENGTHENING

2 Corinthians 12:19 — In the Sight of God

“Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.”
“Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you?”
Paul knew it might look like he was just defending himself.
“We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ.”
But Paul was not answering to the Corinthians.
He was answering to God.
“Everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.”
The goal of all his words was to build them up.
Notice he calls them **“dear friends.”**
Even in correction, Paul loved them.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:3
It does not matter much to me if I am judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself.
Romans 15:2
Each of us should please our neighbor, doing what is good for them and helping them grow strong in faith.
Ephesians 4:29
Do not say anything harmful. Say only what is helpful for building others up, so your words bring grace to those who hear.

Spiritual Principle

Godly words aim to strengthen others, not merely to defend ourselves.

Application

Are your words building others up?

XX. I FEAR WHAT I MAY FIND

2 Corinthians 12:20 — Sins of Division

“For I fear that when I come, I may not find you as I wish, and that you may not find me as you wish. I fear there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder.”
“I may not find you as I wish.”
Paul hoped to find them changed.
“And that you may not find me as you wish.”
If they had not changed, Paul would have to be firm.
Then Paul lists eight sins that destroy a church.

- Quarreling.
- Jealousy.
- Outbursts of anger.
- Selfish ambition.
- Slander.
- Gossip.
- Arrogance.
- Disorder.

All of these are sins of attitude and relationship.
They tear a church apart from the inside.

Cross References

Galatians 5:20
The sinful nature produces worship of idols, witchcraft, hatred, fighting, jealousy, fits of anger, selfishness, division, and splitting into groups.
1 Corinthians 3:3
You are still living by worldly ways. Since there is jealousy and fighting among you, are you not acting like people of the world?
James 3:16
When people are jealous and only out for themselves, things fall apart and all sorts of evil follow.

Spiritual Principle

Sins of attitude can destroy a church just as surely as outward sins.

Spiritual Warning

Quarreling, gossip, and pride are not small sins in God's eyes.

XXI. MOURNING OVER UNREPENTED SIN

2 Corinthians 12:21 — My God May Humble Me

“I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin, and debauchery in which they have indulged.”
“My God may humble me before you.”
Paul's greatest embarrassment would not be his weakness.
It would be finding his spiritual children still in sin.
“I may have to mourn over many.”
Paul would grieve, not gloat.
His heart would break.
“Who have sinned earlier and have not repented.”
The problem was not only the sin.
It was the refusal to repent.
“Of the impurity, sexual sin, and debauchery.”
These were sins of the body.
Corinth was known for its immorality.
Some believers had slipped back into the old life.
Paul longed for them to turn back before he came.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 5:1
People are saying that there is sexual sin among you, the kind that even pagans do not allow.
Galatians 5:19
The things the sinful nature does are easy to see: sexual sin, impurity, and wild living.
1 Corinthians 5:2
And you are proud! You should have been filled with sorrow and removed the man who did this from among you.

Spiritual Principle

True leaders grieve over unrepented sin and long for repentance.

Application

Is there any sin you need to repent of before it hardens your heart?

XXII. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 12

1. Spiritual Experiences Must Not Breed Pride

“To keep me from becoming conceited... there was given me a thorn in the flesh.”

Principle:

Paul's vision of heaven was kept in humility through his thorn in the flesh.

2. God's Grace Is Sufficient

“My grace is sufficient for you.”

Principle:

Weakness is not a failure but the very place where Christ's power shines brightest.

3. True Ministry Is Sacrificial

“I seek not your possessions but you.”

Principle:

Paul sought not the Corinthians' possessions but their souls, showing a parent's love.

4. Leaders Must Correct in Love

“Everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.”

Principle:

Paul's warnings show both his fear for their sins and his hope for their repentance.

5. Strength Is Found in Surrender

“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Principle:

When we are weak, we are truly strong in Christ.

XXIII. THE THORN AND THE GRACE

Verses 7–10 tell one of the most important stories in Paul's life.

The Danger

Pride after great revelations.

The Thorn

A painful weakness that would not go away.

The Source

A messenger of Satan, allowed by God.

The Prayer

Three times Paul begged for it to be removed.

The Answer

“My grace is sufficient for you.”

The Purpose

“My power is made perfect in weakness.”

The Result

“I will most gladly boast in my weaknesses.”

What the Thorn Might Have Been

Paul does not say, and Bible students hold different views.

- A physical illness, perhaps an eye problem.
- A difficulty in speaking.
- Constant persecution and opposition.
- Some other painful trial.

Because Paul did not name it, believers with every kind of thorn can find hope in this passage.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may not remove your thorn, but He will never leave you without grace.

XXIV. THE PARADOX OF STRENGTH

Verse 10 states the great Christian paradox.

The World Says

- Hide your weakness.
- Trust in your own strength.
- Avoid hardship.
- Boast in success.

God Says

- Admit your weakness.
- Trust in My strength.
- Find My grace in hardship.
- Boast in what shows My power.

Five Places Paul Found Strength

- Weaknesses.
- Insults.
- Hardships.
- Persecutions.
- Difficulties.

Key Truth

Our weakness is not an obstacle to God's power; it is the stage on which He displays it.

XXV. A SPIRITUAL PARENT'S HEART

Verses 14–19 show the love of a true shepherd.

He Wants People, Not Possessions

“I seek not your possessions but you.”

He Provides Like a Parent

“Parents save up for their children.”

He Gives Everything

“I will most gladly spend and be spent.”

He Loves Even When Not Loved Back

“If I love you more, am I to be loved less?”

He Lives with Integrity

“Did we not walk in the same spirit?”

He Speaks to Build Up

“Everything we do... is for your strengthening.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A true shepherd's love is measured by what he gives, not by what he gets.

XXVI. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 12 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

He Gives Revelations

“Visions and revelations from the Lord.”

He Hears Our Prayers

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord.”

He Speaks to His Servants

“But He said to me.”

His Grace Is Enough

“My grace is sufficient for you.”

His Power Rests on the Weak

“So that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

He Is Worth Every Hardship

“For the sake of Christ, then, I delight in weaknesses.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jesus does not always take away our weakness, but He always gives grace that is greater.

XXVII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did Paul speak of his vision as if it happened to “a man in Christ”?
To avoid drawing attention to himself and to show humility.

Question 2

What is the “third heaven”?
The very presence of God, also called Paradise.

Question 3

Why did Paul keep his vision secret for fourteen years?
He did not use spiritual experiences to build his reputation.

Question 4

Why was Paul given a thorn in the flesh?
To keep him from becoming proud because of his great revelations.

Question 5

What was the thorn?
Paul does not say.
Suggestions include an illness, a speech difficulty, or ongoing persecution.

Question 6

How did God answer Paul's prayer?
Not by removing the thorn, but by promising, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

Question 7

What does it mean that God's power is made perfect in weakness?
God's power is shown most clearly when we depend on Him because we cannot do it ourselves.

Question 8

How can Paul say, “When I am weak, then I am strong”?
His weakness drove him to depend on Christ, and Christ's strength became his.

Question 9

What were the marks of a true apostle?
Signs, wonders, and mighty works, done with great perseverance.

Question 10

What did Paul mean by “I seek not your possessions but you”?
He wanted their hearts and their spiritual good, not their money.

Question 11

What did Paul fear he would find in Corinth?
Quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance, disorder, and unrepented sexual sin.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 12 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 12 should cause believers to live:

- Humble about spiritual experiences.
- Praying honestly about their pain.
- Trusting God when He says no.
- Resting in His sufficient grace.
- Depending on Christ's strength in weakness.
- Loving others sacrificially.
- Speaking to build others up.
- Repenting quickly of sin.

XXVIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 12 asks several important questions.

Do I Boast About Spiritual Experiences?

Or do I keep them humbly before God?

What Is My Thorn?

What weakness or pain has God not removed?

How Do I Pray About It?

Do I bring it honestly to God?

Can I Accept God's Answer?

Even when He says no?

Do I Believe His Grace Is Enough?

Or do I feel I need something more?

Do I Hide My Weakness?

Or let it point to Christ's power?

Do I Love Sacrificially?

Am I willing to spend and be spent for others?

Is There Sin I Have Not Repented Of?

What do I need to turn from today?

XXIX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Grace Greater Than the Thorn”

Every believer has a thorn.
Some carry pain in their bodies.
Some carry pain in their minds.
Some carry pain in their families.
Some carry pain from people who oppose them.
Like Paul, we pray.
We ask God to take it away.
Sometimes He does.
But sometimes He says no.
That does not mean He does not care.
It does not mean He has not heard.
It means He has something better than relief.
He gives grace.
Grace to face today.
Grace to keep going tomorrow.
Grace that turns weakness into a place where Christ's power rests.
This creates a powerful principle.
God's “no” to the thorn is never a “no” to you.
It is His “yes” to more of His grace and more of His power in your life.

Principle:

When God does not remove the thorn, He gives grace that is greater than the thorn.

XXX. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 12 takes us from heaven to a thorn.
It shows Paul caught up into Paradise.
It shows him humbled by weakness.
It shows him praying for relief.
It shows God giving grace instead.
It shows the power of Christ resting on a weak man.
It shows a parent's love for wandering children.
And it shows a pastor's heartbreak over unrepented sin.
2 Corinthians 12 therefore reminds us:
Never let spiritual blessings make you proud.
Never think God has abandoned you because He said no.
Never believe His grace is not enough.
Never be ashamed of weakness that shows His strength.
Never stop loving, even when love is not returned.
The church does not need people who look strong.
It needs:
Believers who are humble.
Believers who rest in grace.
Believers who depend on Christ's power.
And believers who love sacrificially.
The same Lord still says:
Tell people that His grace is sufficient.
Tell people that His power is made perfect in weakness.
Tell people that weakness can become strength in Christ.
Tell people that it is not too late to repent.
And as you live:
Stay humble.
Pray honestly.
Rest in grace.
Be strong in your weakness.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for the glory of heaven, more wonderful than words can say.
Thank You that You care enough to keep us humble.
Thank You that You hear our prayers, even when Your answer is different from what we ask.
Thank You that Your grace is sufficient for us.
Thank You that Your power is made perfect in weakness.
Thank You that when we are weak, then we are strong.
Forgive us when we have been proud of our blessings.
Forgive us when we have doubted Your love because of our pain.

Forgive us when we have hidden our weakness instead of bringing it to You.
Forgive us when we have sought what others have instead of seeking their good.
Forgive us for sins we have not yet turned from.
Help us accept the thorns You allow.
Let the power of Christ rest upon us.
Teach us to delight in weakness for His sake.
Make us willing to spend and be spent for others.
Keep our church free from quarreling, gossip, and pride.
And lead us to repent quickly of every sin.
“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Central Truth

God keeps His servants humble through weakness, gives them grace that is always enough, shows His power most clearly when they are weak, and fills them with sacrificial love that seeks the good and repentance of His people.

2 Corinthians 12 in One Sentence

Paul humbly tells of being caught up into Paradise, explains that God gave him a thorn in the flesh to keep him from pride and answered his prayers with the promise that His grace is sufficient and His power is made perfect in weakness, reminds the Corinthians of his sacrificial love that sought them and not their possessions, and warns them to repent before his coming visit.

2 Corinthians Chapter 13 —
Final Warnings and Benediction

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 13 is the final chapter of the letter.
Paul is about to visit Corinth for the third time.
He has opened his heart.
He has defended his ministry.
He has boasted in his weakness.
Now he gives his final warnings.
Those who continued in sin would be dealt with.
Some in Corinth wanted proof that Christ was really speaking through Paul.
Paul answers that Christ is not weak among them.
He was crucified in weakness, but He lives by the power of God.
Then Paul turns the question around.
Instead of testing Paul, they should test themselves.
“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.”
Paul prays that they will do what is right.
He hopes he will not need to be harsh when he comes.
His authority was given to build them up, not tear them down.
Then the letter ends with warmth.
Rejoice.
Be restored.
Encourage one another.
Be of one mind.
Live in peace.
And finally, Paul gives one of the most beautiful blessings in the Bible.
“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”
The chapter moves through three movements:

- Paul's Third Visit Announced (verses 1–4).
- A Call to Self-Examination (verses 5–10).
- Final Greetings and Blessing (verses 11–14).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 13 is:
Believers must examine themselves to be sure Christ lives in them, receive loving correction meant to build them up, live together in joy, unity, and peace, and rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

I. THE THIRD VISIT

2 Corinthians 13:1 — Two or Three Witnesses

“This will be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.””
“This will be my third visit to you.”
Paul's first visit was when he planted the church.
His second was the painful visit mentioned earlier in the letter.
Now he was coming a third time.
“Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”
Paul quotes the law of Moses.
In Israel, no one could be judged guilty on the word of only one person.
There had to be clear evidence.
Paul would be fair.
He would not act on rumors.
Any discipline would be based on clear facts.
Some Bible students also see his three visits as a kind of three-fold witness to the church.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 19:15
> One witness is not enough to convict someone of a crime or wrongdoing. A case must be proven by what two or three witnesses say.

Matthew 18:16
> If he will not listen, take one or two others with you, so that everything said can be backed up by two or three witnesses.

John 8:17
> Your own law says that when two people agree about something, what they say is true.

Spiritual Principle

Godly correction must be fair, careful, and based on clear truth.

Key Truth

God's people should never act on rumors or gossip.

II. I WILL NOT SPARE THEM

2 Corinthians 13:2 — A Clear Warning

“I warned you before when I was with you the second time. Now, while absent, I again warn those who have sinned previously and all the rest, that if I come again, I will not spare them.”
“I warned you before when I was with you the second time.”
Paul had already warned them in person.
“Now, while absent, I again warn.”
Now he warns them again in writing.
“Those who have sinned previously and all the rest.”

The warning was for those still living in sin, and for anyone tempted to join them.
“If I come again, I will not spare them.”
Paul had been patient.
He had been gentle.
But patience has a limit.
If they did not repent, he would act.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:21
What would you like? Should I come to you with a rod for discipline, or with love and a gentle spirit?
2 Corinthians 10:2
I am asking you not to make me be bold when I come, because I am ready to stand up to those who say we live by worldly standards.
Titus 1:13
What they say about them is true. So correct them firmly, so that their faith will become healthy.

Spiritual Principle

God's patience is great, but it is not endless.

Spiritual Warning

Do not mistake God's patience for approval of sin.

III. CHRIST IS POWERFUL AMONG YOU

2 Corinthians 13:3 — Proof That Christ Speaks

“Since you are seeking proof that Christ is speaking through me—He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.”
“Since you are seeking proof that Christ is speaking through me.”
Some in Corinth doubted Paul.
They wanted proof that he truly spoke for Christ.
“He is not weak in dealing with you.”
Paul may have seemed weak.
But Christ is not weak.
“But is powerful among you.”
The Corinthians had already seen Christ's power.
Their own faith and spiritual gifts were proof that Christ had worked through Paul.
And if needed, Christ's power would be seen in discipline too.

Cross References

Matthew 10:20
You will not be the ones speaking. The Spirit of your Father will be speaking through you.
1 Corinthians 5:4
When you meet together in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, the power of the Lord Jesus is there with you.

Jeremiah 1:9
Then the Lord reached out and touched my mouth. He said to me, “Look, I have put My words in your mouth.”

Spiritual Principle

Christ speaks with power through His faithful servants.

Key Truth

The messenger may be weak, but the Lord who sends him is mighty.

IV. CRUCIFIED IN WEAKNESS, LIVING BY POWER

2 Corinthians 13:4 — Weak in Him, Alive with Him

“For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. Likewise, we are weak in Him, but by God's power we will live with Him in our dealings with you.”
This verse explains the whole pattern of Paul's ministry.
“Though He was crucified in weakness.”
On the cross, Jesus looked completely weak.
He was mocked, beaten, and killed.
“Yet He lives by the power of God.”
But God raised Him from the dead.
He now lives in power.
“Likewise, we are weak in Him.”
Paul shared in Christ's weakness.
He suffered and was looked down on.
“But by God's power we will live with Him in our dealings with you.”
Paul would also share in Christ's power.
When he came, God's power would be seen.
The cross and the resurrection are the pattern for the Christian life.
Weakness first, then power.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:23
Our message is about Christ nailed to a cross. Many Jews trip over this message, and many Gentiles laugh at it as nonsense.
Philippians 3:10
My deepest desire is to know Christ, to feel the same power that brought Him back to life, and to share His sufferings until I become like Him even in His death.
Romans 1:4
By the power of the Holy Spirit, He was shown to be the Son of God with power when He was raised from the dead. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Spiritual Principle

The way of the cross leads to the power of the resurrection.

Key Truth

Christ's weakness on the cross was not defeat; it was the path to victory.

V. EXAMINE YOURSELVES

2 Corinthians 13:5 — Test Yourselves

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you—unless you fail the test?”
This is one of the most searching verses in the Bible.
The Corinthians had been testing Paul.
Now Paul tells them to test themselves.
“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.”
The real question was not about Paul.
It was about them.
Did they truly belong to Christ?
“Test yourselves.”
Look honestly at your own life.
“Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?”
For true believers, Christ lives within.
Paul expected most of them to find this true.
“Unless you fail the test.”
But some might find that their faith was not real.
Bible students understand this verse in slightly different ways.
Many see it as a call to make sure one's faith is genuine.
Others stress that Paul is mainly reminding them that Christ is already in them, so they should live like it.
Both agree that self-examination should lead us to Christ, not to despair.
The goal is not to doubt endlessly, but to see honestly and to trust Him fully.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 11:28
Everyone should look carefully at his own heart before he eats the bread and drinks from the cup.
Galatians 6:4
Each person should take a careful look at his own work. Then he can be proud of what he himself has done, without comparing himself with someone else.
Colossians 1:27
God wanted His people to know this great and glorious secret, which is for the Gentiles too: Christ lives in you, and He is your hope of sharing God's glory.

Spiritual Principle

Every believer should honestly examine whether Christ truly lives in them.

Application

When you look at your life, do you see the evidence of Christ in you?

VI. WE HAVE NOT FAILED

2 Corinthians 13:6 — Paul's Confidence

“And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.”
The Corinthians had questioned Paul.
But if they examined themselves and found Christ in them, that would prove something.
It would prove that Paul's ministry was real.
Paul had brought them the gospel.
Their faith was the fruit of his work.
So if they passed the test, Paul passed too.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 9:27
> I train my body and keep it under control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

2 Timothy 2:15
> Do your very best to stand before God as a worker He is pleased with, one who has no reason to be embarrassed, because you handle the true message the right way.

Romans 16:10
> Greet Apelles, who has proven himself faithful in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The faith of those we serve is the best evidence of our ministry.

Key Truth

Changed lives are the true credentials of God's servants.

VII. DO WHAT IS RIGHT

2 Corinthians 13:7 — Paul's Prayer

“Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people may see that we have stood the test, but so that you may do what is right, even if we seem to have failed.”
“We pray to God that you will not do anything wrong.”
Paul's prayer was for their holiness.
“Not so that people may see that we have stood the test.”
Paul was not trying to look good.
“But so that you may do what is right.”
He simply wanted them to live rightly.
“Even if we seem to have failed.”
Here is a beautiful humility.
If they repented, Paul would have no need to show his authority.
Some might then say he was weak.
Paul did not care.
He would rather look weak and see them do right.

Cross References

Philippians 4:8
One last thing, my brothers and sisters: fill your thoughts with things that are true, worthy of respect, fair, clean, beautiful, and well spoken of. If something is good and deserves praise, think about that.
Romans 12:17
Never pay back evil with more evil. Be careful to do what everyone can see is good.
1 Thessalonians 5:22
Stay away from everything that is evil.

Spiritual Principle

A true servant cares more about others doing right than about his own reputation.

Application

Do you care more about looking right or about others being right with God?

VIII. FOR THE TRUTH

2 Corinthians 13:8 — Not Against the Truth

“For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”
Paul's authority had limits.
He could not use it against the truth.
He could only use it to serve the truth.
If the Corinthians repented, there would be nothing to punish.
Paul would never act against people who were doing right.
God's truth guided everything he did.

Cross References

John 18:37
Jesus said, “I was born and came into the world for this reason: to tell people the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to Me.”
3 John 1:4
Nothing makes me happier than hearing that my children are living by the truth.
Proverbs 23:23
Get the truth and never sell it. Get wisdom, discipline, and understanding too.

Spiritual Principle

God's servants must always stand for the truth, never against it.

Key Truth

Truth is not a tool we use; it is a master we serve.

IX. WEAK THAT YOU MAY BE STRONG

2 Corinthians 13:9 — Praying for Maturity

“We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your maturity and perfection.”
“We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong.”
Paul was happy to be weak if it meant they were strong.
He did not need to be the hero.
“And our prayer is for your maturity and perfection.”
The word here carries the idea of being restored, mended, or made complete.
It was used for mending fishing nets or setting a broken bone.
Paul prayed that the broken places in the church would be healed.
He prayed that they would grow into full maturity in Christ.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 12:10
> So for Christ's sake I am glad in my weaknesses, insults, hard times, persecutions, and troubles. When I am weak, that is when I am strong.

Colossians 1:28
> We tell everyone about Christ. We warn and teach with all wisdom, so that we can bring each person to God fully grown in Christ.

Ephesians 4:13
> This will continue until we all come together in faith and in knowing the Son of God, becoming mature and growing to the full measure of Christ.

Spiritual Principle

A true leader prays for the growth and restoration of others, even at his own expense.

Application

Are you praying for the spiritual growth of others?

X. NOT HARSH

2 Corinthians 13:10 — Authority for Building Up

“This is why I write these things while I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.”
“This is why I write these things while I am absent.”
Paul wrote this letter ahead of time for a reason.
“That when I come I may not have to be harsh.”
He wanted them to repent before he arrived.
Then he would not need to be severe.
“The authority the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.”
Paul repeats what he said in Chapter 10.

Authority in the church has one purpose.
To build people up.
Even discipline, when needed, is meant to restore.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 10:8
> Even if I brag a little too much about the authority the Lord gave us, I am not ashamed. He gave it to build you up, not to tear you down.

1 Corinthians 4:21
> Which would you prefer? Do you want me to come with a rod of correction, or with love and gentleness?

Jeremiah 1:10
> Today I have given you authority over nations and kingdoms to pull up and to tear down, and to build up and to plant.

Spiritual Principle

God gives authority in the church to build up, and even correction is meant to restore.

Key Truth

Warning ahead of time is an act of love.

XI. FINALLY, BROTHERS AND SISTERS

2 Corinthians 13:11 — Five Final Commands

“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”
After all the hard words, Paul ends with warmth.
He calls them **“brothers and sisters.”**
They are family.
He gives five short commands.
“Rejoice!”
Be glad in the Lord.
“Strive for full restoration.”
Work to repair what was broken.
“Encourage one another.”
Build each other up.
“Be of one mind.”
Seek unity in Christ.
“Live in peace.”
Stop the quarreling.
“And the God of love and peace will be with you.”
Here is the promise.
When God's people live this way, they experience His presence in a special way.

Cross References

Philippians 4:4
Keep on being glad in the Lord, no matter what. Let me say it one more time: be glad!
Romans 12:16
Live in agreement with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to spend time with ordinary people. Do not think you are wiser than everyone else.
Romans 15:33
May the God who gives peace be with all of you. Amen.

Spiritual Principle

A church that rejoices, restores, encourages, agrees, and lives in peace will know the God of love and peace.

Application

Which of these five commands do you most need to obey this week?

XII. A HOLY KISS

2 Corinthians 13:12 — Greeting One Another

“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”
In Paul's day, a kiss on the cheek was a common greeting among family and close friends.
Paul calls it a **holy** kiss.
It was a pure sign of love among believers.
It showed that they were one family in Christ.
In many cultures today, believers show the same love with a handshake, a hug, or a warm greeting.
The form may change.
But the love and welcome behind it should not.
For a church that had been divided, this simple greeting would be a sign of healing.

Cross References

Romans 16:16
Greet each other with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send you their greetings.
1 Corinthians 16:20
All the believers here greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.
1 Peter 5:14
Greet each other with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Believers should welcome one another with genuine, holy affection.

Application

How do you welcome others in your church family?

XIII. ALL GOD'S PEOPLE GREET YOU

2 Corinthians 13:13 — Greetings from the Saints

“All God's people here send their greetings.”
Paul was probably writing from Macedonia.
The believers there sent their love to Corinth.
This simple verse reminds us of something important.
The church is bigger than one congregation.
Believers in different places belong to the same family.
The Corinthians were not alone.

Cross References

Philippians 4:22
All of God's people here send greetings, especially those who work in Caesar's household.
Hebrews 13:24
Greet all your leaders and all of God's people. Those from Italy send their greetings.
Titus 3:15
Everyone with me sends greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with all of you.

Spiritual Principle

Believers everywhere are one family in Christ.

Key Truth

No church stands alone; it is part of God's worldwide family.

XIV. THE GRACE, THE LOVE, AND THE FELLOWSHIP

2 Corinthians 13:14 — The Triune Blessing

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”
Paul ends the letter with one of the richest blessings in the Bible.
It names the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
It is one of the clearest pictures of the Trinity in the New Testament.
“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Jesus gives us undeserved favor.
Through Him, we are forgiven and saved.
“And the love of God.”
The Father's love is the source of our salvation.
He loved us and sent His Son.
“And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”
The Spirit joins us to God and to one another.
He gives us shared life together.

“Be with you all.”
Notice the word **“all.”**
Even the ones Paul had warned.
Even the ones who had criticized him.
Paul wanted every one of them to receive God's blessing.
“Amen.”
So be it.

Cross References

Matthew 28:19
> Go to people of every nation and help them become My disciples. Baptize them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:2
> God the Father chose you long ago as He planned. The Spirit made you holy so you would obey Jesus Christ and be made clean by His blood. May grace and peace be yours more and more.

Ephesians 4:4
> God's people make up a single body, with a single Spirit, and God called all of you to share a single hope.

Spiritual Principle

The full blessing of the Christian life comes from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Key Truth

Grace from the Son, love from the Father, and fellowship in the Spirit are the inheritance of every believer.

XV. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 13

1. Accountability Matters

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.”

Principle:

Believers are urged to test themselves to make sure they are truly in the faith.

2. Christ's Power Works in Weakness

“Though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God.”

Principle:

Just as Jesus triumphed through the cross, Paul's own weakness revealed God's strength.

3. Leaders Correct in Love

“The authority the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.”

Principle:

Authority in the church is given for building up, not tearing down.

4. Unity and Peace Are Essential

“Be of one mind, live in peace.”

Principle:

Paul urges the church to live in harmony, showing love and encouragement to one another.

5. The Triune Blessing

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”

Principle:

The grace of Jesus, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are our full source of life and peace.

XVI. HOW TO EXAMINE YOURSELF

Verse 5 calls every believer to honest self-examination.

Do I Trust Christ Alone for Salvation?

Not my works, my background, or my church membership.

Do I See Christ at Work in Me?

Is there a growing desire to please Him?

Do I Love God's Word?

Do I want to hear and obey it?

Do I Hate Sin?

Do I grieve when I sin and turn back to God?

Do I Love Other Believers?

Do I care for God's people?

Is There Fruit in My Life?

Is the Spirit producing love, joy, peace, and other good fruit?

A Word of Comfort

Self-examination is not meant to crush us.
No believer is perfect.
The goal is to look honestly and then look to Christ.

If you find weakness, run to Him.
If you find no faith at all, it is not too late to trust Him today.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Look honestly at yourself, then look fully to Christ.

XVII. FIVE MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

Verse 11 gives five commands for church life.

1. Rejoice

A joyful church.

2. Strive for Full Restoration

A healing church.

3. Encourage One Another

A supportive church.

4. Be of One Mind

A united church.

5. Live in Peace

A peaceful church.

The Promise

“The God of love and peace will be with you.”

Key Truth

Where God's people live in joy, unity, and peace, they know His presence in a special way.

XVIII. THE TRIUNE BLESSING

Verse 14 shows the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

- Undeserved favor.
- Forgiveness of sins.
- Salvation through the cross.

The Love of God the Father

- The source of salvation.
- The love that sent the Son.
- A love that never fails.

The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

- Living union with God.
- Shared life with other believers.
- Daily help and presence.

For Everyone

“Be with you all.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The whole Trinity is at work in the life of every believer.

XIX. LOOKING BACK OVER 2 CORINTHIANS

The final chapter is a good place to remember the whole letter.

Chapters 1–7: Comfort and Reconciliation

- The God of all comfort.
- Treasure in jars of clay.
- A new creation in Christ.
- The ministry of reconciliation.
- Godly sorrow that leads to repentance.

Chapters 8–9: The Grace of Giving

- Christ became poor to make us rich.
- God loves a cheerful giver.
- Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.

Chapters 10–13: Paul's Defense and Final Appeal

- The weapons of our warfare.
- Boasting in weakness.
- My grace is sufficient for you.
- Examine yourselves.
- Grace, love, and fellowship.

Key Truth

The great theme of 2 Corinthians is that God's power is shown through human weakness.

XX. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 13 TEACHES ABOUT GOD

He Is Just

“Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

He Raised Jesus by His Power

“He lives by the power of God.”

He Lives in His People

“Jesus Christ is in you.”

He Is the God of Love and Peace

“The God of love and peace will be with you.”

He Is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”

He Blesses All His People

“Be with you all.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The God who corrects His people in love is the same God who blesses them with grace, love, and fellowship.

XXI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why does Paul mention two or three witnesses?
To show that any discipline would be fair and based on clear evidence, not rumors.

Question 2

What warning does Paul give in verse 2?
Those who continued in sin without repenting would not be spared when he came.

Question 3

What proof did the Corinthians want?

Proof that Christ was really speaking through Paul.

Question 4

How does the cross explain Paul's ministry?
Jesus was crucified in weakness but lives by God's power, and Paul shared that same pattern.

Question 5

What does Paul tell the Corinthians to examine?
Whether they are truly in the faith and whether Christ lives in them.

Question 6

Should self-examination lead to fear and doubt?
No.
It should lead us to honest repentance and fresh trust in Christ.

Question 7

What did Paul pray for the Corinthians?
That they would do what is right, even if it made him look weak.

Question 8

What does “maturity and perfection” mean in verse 9?
Being restored, healed, and made complete in Christ.

Question 9

Why did Paul write before coming?
So that they would repent and he would not have to be harsh.

Question 10

What five commands does Paul give in verse 11?
Rejoice, strive for restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, and live in peace.

Question 11

What is the “holy kiss”?
A pure greeting of love among believers, shown today in many cultures by a handshake or hug.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 13 change about the way Christians live today?
2 Corinthians 13 should cause believers to live:

- Taking sin seriously.
- Examining their own hearts honestly.
- Trusting that Christ lives in them.
- Praying for others to do what is right.
- Standing for the truth.

- Rejoicing and encouraging one another.
- Seeking unity and peace.
- Resting in the grace, love, and fellowship of God.

XXII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 13 asks several important questions.

Am I Taking God's Warnings Seriously?

Or am I presuming on His patience?

Have I Examined Myself?

Am I truly in the faith?

Is Christ Living in Me?

What evidence do I see?

Do I Care More About Others or My Reputation?

Would I rather look good or see others do right?

Am I Standing for the Truth?

Even when it is costly?

Am I Helping Restore What Is Broken?

Is there a relationship I need to mend?

Am I Living in Peace?

Or am I part of the conflict?

Am I Resting in God's Blessing?

Do I live each day in His grace, love, and fellowship?

XXIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Grace, Love, and Fellowship”

2 Corinthians was a hard letter to write.
Paul had been criticized.
He had been misunderstood.
He had faced false teachers.

He had shed many tears.
He had to give strong warnings.
But how does he end?
Not with a threat.
Not with a complaint.
He ends with a blessing.
Grace from Jesus.
Love from the Father.
Fellowship from the Spirit.
And he gives it to all of them.
Even to those who had hurt him.
This creates a powerful principle.
A heart filled with God's grace will end with blessing, even after conflict.
When we have been hurt, we can still wish God's best for those who hurt us.

Principle:

Let your final word to others be a blessing, because God's final word to you is grace.

XXIV. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 13 brings the letter to a close.
It warns that sin must be dealt with.
It shows that Christ's power works through weakness.
It calls each believer to honest self-examination.
It shows a leader who cares more about others than his own reputation.
It calls the church to joy, restoration, encouragement, unity, and peace.
And it ends with the blessing of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
2 Corinthians 13 therefore reminds us:
Never ignore God's warnings.
Never assume your faith without examining it.
Never use authority to tear others down.
Never let conflict have the last word.
Never forget the grace, love, and fellowship that are yours in God.
The church does not need people who only test others.
It needs:
Believers who examine themselves.
Leaders who build up.
Churches that live in peace.
And hearts that rest in the blessing of the triune God.
The same God still calls:
Tell people that Christ was crucified in weakness and lives by God's power.
Tell people that Christ can live in them.
Tell people that the God of love and peace wants to be with them.
Tell people about the grace, love, and fellowship of God.
And as you live:
Examine yourself.
Rejoice.
Live in peace.

Rest in God's grace, love, and fellowship.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Thank You for this letter and for all it has taught us.
Thank You that You are just and fair in all Your ways.
Thank You that Christ was crucified in weakness and lives by Your power.
Thank You that Christ lives in all who trust Him.
Thank You for leaders who correct us in love to build us up.
Thank You that You are the God of love and peace.
Forgive us when we have ignored Your warnings.
Forgive us when we have tested others but not ourselves.
Forgive us when we have cared more about our reputation than about doing right.
Forgive us when we have caused conflict instead of peace.
Help us examine our hearts honestly.
Help us see Christ living in us.
Make us people who rejoice, restore, and encourage.
Make us one in mind and peaceful in spirit.
And let the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.
“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” — 2 Corinthians 13:14

Central Truth

Believers must examine themselves to be sure Christ lives in them, receive loving correction meant to build them up, live together in joy, unity, and peace, and rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13 in One Sentence

Paul warns that he will deal with unrepented sin on his third visit, reminds the Corinthians that Christ was crucified in weakness but lives by God's power, calls them to examine themselves to see whether they are in the faith, urges them to rejoice, be restored, and live in peace, and blesses them with the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

EPILOGUE

When Human Strength Ends, God's Grace Remains

The Eternal Triumph of Divine Power Through Human Weakness

There comes a moment in every Christian's life when the illusion of personal strength is shattered.

It may happen in a hospital room when a physician delivers news no one ever wanted to hear. It may occur beside the grave of someone deeply loved, when the silence of death seems almost unbearable. It may come through betrayal, financial hardship, the collapse of cherished dreams, or the realization that years of faithful service have not prevented suffering.

For some, that moment comes quietly, when the burdens of life become so heavy that even the strongest heart begins to tremble.

For others, it arrives suddenly, when circumstances beyond their control expose how fragile human existence truly is.

Whatever form it takes, the experience eventually brings us face-to-face with a truth that human pride desperately resists:

We are not sufficient in ourselves.

We cannot control every circumstance. We cannot prevent every sorrow. We cannot eliminate every temptation, silence every enemy, or guarantee that tomorrow will unfold according to our expectations.

We are creatures of dust, dependent upon the sustaining mercy of the God who formed us.

Yet the message of Second Corinthians assures us that the discovery of our weakness need not become the beginning of despair.

It may become the beginning of a deeper dependence upon Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul discovered that God's power was not diminished by his limitations. His ministry was not rendered meaningless by his suffering. His calling was not canceled by opposition, and his eternal hope was not destroyed by earthly affliction.

Indeed, some of the greatest spiritual lessons of his life emerged through the very circumstances he would never have chosen for himself.

And as we conclude this journey through Second Corinthians, one glorious truth rises above every trial, every tear, and every expression of human weakness:

The grace of God is sufficient, the power of Christ is unfailing, and the promises of the Lord are eternal.

I. The God Who Meets Us in Our Suffering

Our journey through Second Corinthians began with one of the most beautiful descriptions of God found anywhere in Scripture.

Paul introduced Him as the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

This was not an abstract theological statement disconnected from the realities of life.

It was the testimony of a man who had experienced extraordinary hardship and discovered that divine mercy remained available through it all.

Paul knew physical suffering.

He understood emotional anguish.

He experienced opposition, disappointment, uncertainty, and the burden of responsibility for the churches.

Yet he refused to conclude that his afflictions demonstrated divine abandonment.

Instead, he recognized that God's comfort was greater than his circumstances.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, he declared:

> "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;
>
> Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

There is a profound lesson within these verses.

God does not promise that His children will escape every sorrow, but He reveals Himself as the One who sustains them through their afflictions.

His comfort is not dependent upon favorable circumstances.

His mercy is not exhausted by repeated trials.

His faithfulness does not diminish when earthly resources disappear.

The Christian may find himself surrounded by difficulties, but he is never beyond the knowledge and care of his heavenly Father.

Furthermore, the comfort received from God prepares believers to minister to others.

The sorrow that once seemed overwhelming may become the means through which a wounded Christian learns to encourage another suffering soul.

The experience that appeared to serve no useful purpose may later equip a believer with compassion, patience, and spiritual understanding.

God does not waste the suffering of His people.

This does not mean that every trial will be fully explained during our earthly lives. The Scriptures do not promise that we will understand every detail of divine providence.

But they do assure us that the Lord is wise, faithful, merciful, and sovereign.

The believer can therefore trust the character of God even when he cannot understand the circumstances permitted by God.

Our comfort rests not in knowing everything God is doing, but in knowing the God who governs all things.

II. The Treasure Is Greater Than the Vessel

Among the most memorable truths in Second Corinthians is Paul's declaration that we possess heavenly treasure in earthen vessels.

The image is both humbling and encouraging.

A clay vessel is fragile.

It can be broken.

It possesses little glory in itself.

Its usefulness depends upon what it contains and the purpose for which it is employed.

Paul used this picture to explain the nature of Christian ministry.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, he wrote:

> "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

The treasure is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

The vessel is the weak and imperfect human servant entrusted with its proclamation.

What an extraordinary arrangement of divine wisdom!

God could have chosen to proclaim His gospel through displays of overwhelming heavenly splendor.

Instead, He has entrusted the message of reconciliation to ordinary people.

He uses men and women who experience weakness, discouragement, physical limitations, and emotional struggles.

He calls servants who must continually depend upon His grace.

Why?

So that the excellency of the power may be recognized as belonging to God rather than humanity.

The glory of the gospel is not dependent upon the greatness of the messenger.

The effectiveness of divine truth is not ultimately determined by the popularity of the preacher.

The power of salvation does not originate in the intellectual ability, personality, education, or eloquence of the individual proclaiming it.

The power belongs to God.

This truth should bring humility to every minister and encouragement to every believer.

The preacher who has faithfully served in obscurity has not necessarily failed.

The small congregation that remains committed to biblical truth is not spiritually insignificant.

The elderly saint whose physical strength has diminished may still possess a powerful testimony to the faithfulness of God.

The believer whose circumstances prevent public recognition may nevertheless accomplish eternal good through prayer, encouragement, obedience, and quiet faithfulness.

God does not measure usefulness according to the standards of human applause.

He looks upon the heart.

He honors faithfulness.

He accomplishes His purposes through the instruments He chooses.

And the treasure remains glorious even when the vessel is fragile.

III. The Glory That Awaits Beyond the Suffering

One of the greatest mistakes a Christian can make is to interpret eternity exclusively through the circumstances of the present.

Human beings naturally focus upon what they can see.

We observe pain.

We recognize loss.

We experience disappointment.

We measure time according to days, months, and years.

But the Apostle Paul teaches that the believer must learn to evaluate earthly life from the perspective of eternity.

In 2 Corinthians 4:17–18, he wrote:

> "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;
>
> While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Paul's description of affliction as light and momentary was not a denial of its intensity.

This was a man who had endured beatings, imprisonment, persecution, danger, deprivation, and tremendous emotional suffering.

His hardships were real.

His wounds were painful.

His burdens were heavy.

Yet when he placed those afflictions beside the everlasting glory prepared for God's people, the comparison transformed his perspective.

The suffering of this present life, however severe, is temporary.

The glory awaiting the redeemed is eternal.

Earthly sorrow has an appointed limit.

The inheritance secured through Jesus Christ will never fade.

The body may weaken and eventually die, but the believer possesses the promise of resurrection and everlasting life.

The grave is not the final destination of those who belong to Christ.

Death is not the end of the Christian's story.

The Savior who rose triumphantly from the dead has secured the eternal hope of His people.

Therefore, Christian perseverance is not sustained merely by optimism that present circumstances will improve.

It is sustained by the certainty of God's promises in Jesus Christ.

The believer looks beyond the temporary toward the eternal.

Beyond suffering toward glory.

Beyond death toward resurrection.

Beyond the weakness of earthly existence toward the everlasting presence of the Lord.

The Christian's greatest hope is not that this world will eventually satisfy him, but that Jesus Christ has prepared an eternal home that this world can never provide.

IV. The Ministry of Reconciliation in a Divided World

Second Corinthians also reminds us that the gospel is not merely a source of personal encouragement.

It is the divine message through which sinners are called into reconciliation with God.

The human race is separated from its Creator because of sin.

No amount of moral improvement, religious ceremony, cultural advancement, or personal achievement can remove that separation.

Reconciliation requires the gracious intervention of God.

And that intervention has been accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul declares:

> "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

What a glorious promise!

The gospel does not merely encourage sinners to improve their behavior.

It announces the transforming work of God through union with Jesus Christ.

The believer receives a new standing before God and enters a new life that is to be increasingly shaped by the character and purposes of the Savior.

Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 5:20:

> "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

This is the sacred responsibility entrusted to those who proclaim the gospel.

We do not possess the authority to invent a new message.

We are not commissioned to adjust divine truth according to cultural preferences.

We are ambassadors.

An ambassador represents the authority of another.

He does not speak merely according to personal opinion.

He communicates the message entrusted to him.

So it is with Christian ministry.

Our responsibility is to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ faithfully, clearly, and without compromise.

The world desperately needs this message.

It needs more than political solutions, economic reforms, philosophical arguments, or temporary emotional encouragement.

It needs reconciliation with God.

It needs forgiveness of sin.

It needs the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

It needs the transforming power of the gospel.

The church must never abandon this calling.

The message of reconciliation remains the world's greatest need because humanity's deepest problem remains sin.

And God's appointed answer remains the crucified and risen Savior.

V. The Courage to Remain Faithful When Truth Is Opposed

Throughout Second Corinthians, Paul confronted challenges to his apostolic authority and warnings concerning false teachers.

His opponents questioned his qualifications, criticized his ministry, and attempted to influence the Corinthians against him.

Yet Paul refused to abandon the truth entrusted to him.

He understood that genuine Christian ministry could not be measured merely by outward appearance, rhetorical skill, popularity, or personal influence.

The true servant of Christ must be faithful to the message of Christ.

This principle is especially important in an age when religious influence is often evaluated through numbers, financial prosperity, media attention, and public recognition.

None of these things necessarily establishes spiritual authenticity.

A ministry may be widely celebrated while teaching serious doctrinal error.

A preacher may attract enormous crowds while neglecting the central truths of Scripture.

A congregation may possess impressive resources while experiencing spiritual decline.

Conversely, a faithful servant may labor in relative obscurity, endure criticism, and experience little earthly recognition while remaining pleasing to God.

The standard is not worldly success.

The standard is biblical faithfulness.

Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 10:17–18:

> "But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.
>
> For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth."

These words should govern every expression of Christian service.

The preacher must not seek personal glory.

The teacher must not elevate human wisdom above divine revelation.

The church must not surrender doctrinal conviction in exchange for cultural acceptance.

The believer must not measure spiritual success according to the applause of the world.

The approval that ultimately matters is the approval of God.

There may be times when standing for truth brings rejection.

There may be seasons when faithful preaching results in opposition rather than popularity.

There may be circumstances when obedience requires personal sacrifice.

But the Christian must remember that faithfulness to Christ is never wasted.

The Lord sees what the world overlooks.

He knows the motives hidden from human observation.

He recognizes the labor performed in His name.

And He will judge all things with perfect righteousness.

It is better to stand with Christ and be rejected by the world than to gain the admiration of the world through compromise with Christ's truth.

VI. The Thorn That Became a Testimony

If one passage could be selected to summarize the central message of Second Corinthians, it would undoubtedly be the Lord's response to Paul's thorn in the flesh.

Paul had been entrusted with extraordinary revelations.

He had experienced remarkable spiritual privileges.

Yet he was also permitted to endure a painful and persistent affliction.

He called it a thorn in the flesh.

The exact nature of this thorn remains uncertain.

Scripture does not provide sufficient detail to identify it conclusively.

But its spiritual purpose is clearly revealed.

Paul explained that the affliction served to prevent him from becoming exalted above measure.

The apostle pleaded with the Lord three times for its removal.

His request was sincere.

His suffering was genuine.

His desire for relief was understandable.

Yet God did not grant the deliverance Paul requested.

Instead, the Lord answered:

> "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Consider the depth of this answer.

God did not tell Paul that his affliction was imaginary.

He did not rebuke him simply for desiring relief.

He did not promise that faithful believers would never experience suffering.

Instead, He revealed that His grace would remain sufficient even when the thorn remained.

Paul had asked for the removal of the burden.

God promised the strength to endure it.

Paul wanted the circumstances changed.

God revealed that His sustaining power was greater than the circumstances.

Paul desired deliverance from weakness.

God taught him that weakness could become the occasion for a more profound experience of divine sufficiency.

This truth is not always easy to accept.

We naturally desire immediate relief.

When illness comes, we pray for healing.

When financial difficulties arise, we seek provision.

When relationships are broken, we long for restoration.

When suffering continues, we ask the Lord to intervene.

There is nothing inherently wrong with bringing such requests before God.

Scripture repeatedly encourages believers to pray.

But prayer is not an instrument through which human desires compel divine obedience.

Prayer is the privilege of approaching our heavenly Father in faith, submitting our requests to His perfect wisdom and sovereign will.

Sometimes the Lord removes the thorn.

Sometimes He permits it to remain.

But He never ceases to be God.

His wisdom remains perfect.

His promises remain true.

His grace remains sufficient for His people.

The greatest spiritual victory may not be found in escaping every hardship.

It may be found in discovering that Jesus Christ is enough even when the hardship continues.

And that was the testimony Paul learned to embrace.

VII. When I Am Weak, Then Am I Strong

Paul's response to the Lord's declaration reveals the transforming effect of divine grace upon the human heart.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9–10, he wrote:

> "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
>
> Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

These words represent a remarkable spiritual transformation.

Paul did not suddenly become physically invincible.

His enemies did not disappear.

His ministry did not become free from opposition.

His thorn was not removed.

But his understanding of weakness changed.

He no longer viewed his limitations merely as obstacles to spiritual usefulness.

He recognized that human weakness could become the setting in which the power of Christ was most clearly displayed.

This is not a celebration of suffering for its own sake.

Nor does it mean that every difficulty should be passively accepted without seeking appropriate help or relief.

Rather, it is an acknowledgment that the Lord's sustaining power is sufficient when faithful obedience leads His people through hardship.

The Christian who understands this truth no longer needs to pretend that he possesses unlimited strength.

He can acknowledge his dependence upon God.

He can confess his limitations.

He can seek the Lord's wisdom.

He can admit when he is weary.

And he can continue trusting the Savior whose power is never exhausted.

There is a freedom in this kind of dependence.

The burden of self-sufficiency is removed.

The illusion of personal invincibility is abandoned.

The believer learns to rest in the power of Christ rather than the power of human determination.

And in that surrender, genuine spiritual strength is discovered.

The strongest Christian is not necessarily the one who appears to need nothing. It is the one who recognizes that apart from Jesus Christ, he can accomplish nothing of eternal value.

VIII. A Word to the Weary Pastor

As I bring this commentary to its conclusion, I want to speak especially to those who have been called to preach, teach, shepherd, and serve the people of God.

The ministry can be one of the greatest privileges entrusted to a human being.

It is an extraordinary responsibility to stand before others and proclaim the eternal Word of God.

To explain the Scriptures, announce the gospel, encourage the discouraged, comfort the grieving, and lead believers toward spiritual maturity is a calling of profound significance.

Yet ministry can also be painful.

There are burdens that many outside the pastorate may never fully understand.

There are prayers offered in private for people who may never know how deeply they have been loved.

There are difficult conversations, personal disappointments, and moments of profound discouragement.

There are times when a minister may faithfully proclaim the truth and witness little visible response.

There are seasons when criticism becomes louder than encouragement.

There are circumstances when those who have received the greatest spiritual care become the source of the deepest wounds.

Paul knew these experiences.

He understood the weight of responsibility.

He knew the pain of being misunderstood.

He experienced the sorrow of watching believers struggle against the very truth that could strengthen them.

Yet he continued.

Not because he was sufficient in himself.

Not because he possessed unlimited emotional strength.

Not because every congregation responded favorably to his ministry.

He continued because Jesus Christ had called him.

And the grace of Christ sustained him.

To the weary pastor, I offer this encouragement:

Do not confuse difficulty with failure.

Do not measure your calling exclusively by attendance, financial resources, public recognition, or outward achievement.

Do not allow the approval of people to become more important than faithfulness to God.

Preach the Word.

Love the people.

Defend the truth.

Guard your own heart.

Remain humble before the Lord.

And remember that the church ultimately belongs to Jesus Christ.

You are a servant, not the Savior.

You are a steward, not the owner.

You are an instrument, not the source of spiritual life.

The One who called you is able to sustain you.

And when your own strength is exhausted, His grace remains sufficient.

IX. A Word to the Suffering Believer

Perhaps you have read this commentary while carrying a burden that few people understand.

You may be experiencing physical pain.

You may be grieving the death of someone you loved.

You may be facing circumstances that have left you discouraged and uncertain.

You may be struggling with unanswered questions concerning the providence of God.

Perhaps you have prayed repeatedly for deliverance, yet the burden remains.

If so, the testimony of Paul speaks directly to your condition.

The presence of suffering does not prove that God has forgotten you.

The continuation of a trial does not establish that your prayers have been meaningless.

The weakness you experience does not place you beyond the reach of divine grace.

The Lord knows your circumstances.

He understands your limitations.

He is acquainted with your needs.

And His promises do not change according to the instability of earthly life.

This does not mean that every hardship will be removed during the present age.

Nor does it mean that believers will always understand the purposes of God in their suffering.

But it does mean that the Christian's hope rests upon something infinitely greater than favorable circumstances.

Our hope rests upon Jesus Christ.

The same Savior who died for our sins and rose again from the dead has promised eternal life to those who belong to Him.

The same Lord who sustained Paul remains faithful to His people.

The same God who comforts the afflicted continues to work according to His perfect wisdom.

And the same grace that upheld the apostle remains sufficient today.

When you cannot understand the path before you, trust the One who directs your steps.

When you cannot find strength within yourself, depend upon the Lord whose power never fails.

When sorrow overwhelms your heart, remember the eternal hope secured through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And when you discover that the thorn has not been removed, do not conclude that the Savior has withdrawn His care.

His grace may be accomplishing purposes far greater than you can presently see.

You may not possess the strength required for tomorrow, but the Lord is faithful to provide the grace needed for faithful obedience as tomorrow comes.

X. A Word to the Modern Church

The message of Second Corinthians must also be heard by the church collectively.

We are living in an era when religious institutions are frequently tempted to imitate the world in order to gain its approval.

There is pressure to soften biblical convictions, minimize uncomfortable doctrines, and redefine spiritual success according to cultural expectations.

The church is often encouraged to become more entertaining, more marketable, more politically acceptable, and less confrontational concerning the truth.

But the calling of the church has never been to seek popularity at the expense of faithfulness.

The church has been entrusted with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It has been called to proclaim the Word of God.

It has been commanded to make disciples.

It has been established as a community of worship, fellowship, spiritual growth, holiness, and mutual encouragement.

Its mission cannot be fulfilled through the substitution of worldly wisdom for biblical truth.

Second Corinthians reminds us that genuine spiritual power does not originate in human methods.

It comes from God.

The church does not need to manufacture spiritual life through emotional manipulation.

It does not need to disguise the offense of the cross.

It does not need to abandon biblical teaching in order to appear relevant.

The gospel remains relevant because the human condition remains unchanged in its deepest spiritual need.

People still need forgiveness.

Sinners still need reconciliation with God.

Believers still need sanctification.

The brokenhearted still need divine comfort.

The spiritually deceived still need truth.

And the world still needs Jesus Christ.

Therefore, let the church recover its confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture.

Let pastors return to faithful biblical exposition.

Let believers pursue genuine holiness.

Let congregations practice sacrificial love.

Let Christian leaders reject the pursuit of personal glory.

Let the people of God remain steadfast in prayer, worship, fellowship, and the proclamation of the gospel.

And let the church remember that its greatest strength is not found in earthly power, but in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

XI. The Final Examination of Faith

As Paul approached the conclusion of Second Corinthians, he challenged the believers to examine themselves.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5, he wrote:

> "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

This is a solemn and necessary warning.

It is possible to possess religious knowledge without possessing saving faith.

It is possible to attend church without having been reconciled to God.

It is possible to admire Christian teachings while remaining unchanged by the gospel.

It is possible to speak the language of religion without truly belonging to Jesus Christ.

Paul's command calls for honest spiritual examination.

The essential question is not merely whether a person has participated in religious activities.

It is whether that person truly belongs to Christ.

Have you recognized your sin before a holy God?

Have you understood that salvation cannot be earned through your own righteousness?

Have you placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and rose again?

Are you trusting in His finished work rather than your own accomplishments?

Has your profession of faith been accompanied by evidence of God's transforming grace?

These questions are of eternal importance.

The doctrine of salvation must never be reduced to religious tradition or outward conformity.

The gospel announces that sinners are reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

> "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Here is the heart of the Christian message.

Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, became the sacrifice for sinners.

Through His death and resurrection, salvation is proclaimed to those who believe.

The righteousness required for acceptance before God is not produced by human effort.

It is found in Jesus Christ.

And therefore, before this book is closed, I urge every reader to consider the most important question of all:

Do you truly know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior?

A person may understand the history of Corinth, appreciate the theology of Paul, and study every verse of this epistle while still failing to receive the salvation proclaimed within its pages.

Biblical knowledge is precious, but knowledge alone is not the same as saving faith.

The purpose of the Scriptures is to reveal the truth of God and direct sinners toward the Savior.

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ, the invitation of the gospel remains urgent.

Be reconciled to God.

Turn from sin and place your faith in Christ.

Do not rest your eternal hope upon religious achievement, moral reputation, or personal goodness.

Rest it upon the crucified and risen Savior.

For salvation is not the reward of human strength.

It is the gift of divine grace.

XII. The Final Blessing: Grace, Love, and Fellowship

The conclusion of Second Corinthians is remarkable.

After addressing suffering, division, false teaching, apostolic authority, spiritual conflict, and personal weakness, Paul closes with one of the most beautiful blessings in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians 13:14, he writes:

> "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."

What an appropriate conclusion to such a deeply personal letter!

Paul ends not with bitterness, but with blessing.

Not with a demand for personal recognition, but with a prayer for divine grace.

Not with the exaltation of human authority, but with the glory of the triune God.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The love of God.

The communion of the Holy Spirit.

These are the spiritual riches upon which the Christian life depends.

The grace of Christ reminds us that our salvation and spiritual standing are grounded in divine mercy rather than personal merit.

The love of God assures us that redemption originates in the gracious purpose of our heavenly Father.

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit reminds us that believers are not abandoned to live the Christian life through unaided human effort.

The God who saves also sustains.

The God who calls also equips.

The God who begins His work in His people remains faithful to His promises.

And so Paul concludes his letter by directing the Corinthians toward the very source of their spiritual life.

This is where every true Christian ministry must ultimately lead.

Not to the greatness of the preacher.

Not to the reputation of the institution.

Not to the accomplishments of humanity.

But to the grace, love, and fellowship of the living God.

XIII. When the Last Sermon Has Been Preached

There will come a day when every earthly ministry reaches its conclusion.

The final sermon will be preached.

The final lesson will be taught.

The last page will be written.

The final prayer will be offered.

The earthly journey of every servant of Christ will eventually come to an end.

The most gifted preacher cannot continue indefinitely.

The most faithful missionary cannot labor forever in this present world.

The strongest believer will eventually confront the limitations of mortal life.

Even the Apostle Paul completed his earthly course.

Yet the gospel he proclaimed continues to bear witness to the grace of God.

The Scriptures he was inspired to write continue to instruct the church.

The Savior he served continues to save sinners.

And the divine power upon which he depended remains unchanged.

This is an encouraging truth for every believer who desires to leave behind a testimony of faithfulness.

Our earthly accomplishments will eventually fade.

Human recognition is temporary.

Buildings deteriorate.

Institutions change.

Generations pass.

But the Word of God endures forever.

The greatest legacy a Christian can leave is not an impressive collection of worldly achievements.

It is a testimony of genuine faith in Jesus Christ, faithful obedience to His Word, and a life that directed others toward the Savior.

A preacher may be forgotten by the world, but the truth he faithfully proclaimed remains eternally significant.

A believer may never receive public recognition, but God knows every act of faithful service performed in His name.

A life may appear insignificant according to earthly standards, yet possess immeasurable value in the purposes of God.

Therefore, let us live for eternity.

Let us serve Christ while opportunity remains.

Let us proclaim the truth without compromise.

Let us encourage the brokenhearted.

Let us comfort the suffering.

Let us defend the gospel.

Let us walk humbly before our God.

And when our earthly strength begins to fail, let us remember that our hope has never depended upon the permanence of human ability.

Our hope is Jesus Christ.

XIV. The Victory That Weakness Cannot Destroy

The final message of Second Corinthians is not that human beings will eventually become strong enough to overcome every difficulty.

It is that Jesus Christ is sufficient for those who depend upon Him.

The believer's victory does not arise from the elimination of every problem.

It arises from belonging to the Savior whose triumph over sin and death is complete.

The Christian may experience sorrow, but sorrow cannot cancel the promises of God.

He may experience persecution, but persecution cannot destroy the eternal inheritance secured through Christ.

He may face weakness, but weakness cannot diminish the power of the Almighty.

He may experience death, but death cannot separate those who belong to Christ from the eternal life promised through His resurrection.

There is no circumstance beyond the sovereign knowledge of God.

There is no trial capable of exhausting His wisdom.

There is no earthly power sufficient to overthrow His eternal purposes.

And there is no weakness in the believer that places him beyond the sustaining grace of the Lord.

This is why Paul could rejoice in the midst of affliction.

This is why he could continue preaching despite opposition.

This is why he could endure suffering without surrendering his hope.

His confidence was not in himself.

His confidence was in Christ.

And therein lies the enduring message of this entire commentary.

Our weakness reveals our need. God's grace supplies our strength. Christ receives the glory.

XV. A Final Personal Reflection

As I bring *Power in Weakness: God's Strength in a Broken World* to its conclusion, my deepest desire is that this commentary will accomplish something greater than the communication of biblical information.

I pray that it will lead readers to a deeper dependence upon Jesus Christ.

Knowledge of Scripture should produce reverence for the God who inspired it.

Understanding sound doctrine should strengthen our confidence in divine truth.

Recognizing the sovereignty of God should lead us toward humility and trust.

Studying the sufferings of the Apostle Paul should encourage perseverance.

Examining the grace of God should awaken gratitude.

And contemplating the glory of Christ should deepen our worship.

The Christian life was never intended to become a monument to human ability.

It is a testimony to divine mercy.

Everything we possess of eternal value comes from the Lord.

We are saved by grace.

We are sustained by grace.

We are strengthened by grace.

We are corrected by grace.

We are equipped for service by grace.

And when our earthly journey reaches its conclusion, we will enter the presence of God solely through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

There will be no room for boasting in human righteousness.

No opportunity to claim personal merit as the foundation of salvation.

No reason to exalt the achievements of the creature above the glory of the Creator.

All praise will belong to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us.

As an author, preacher, and student of God's Word, I recognize that no commentary can exhaust the riches of divine revelation.

Every faithful study of Scripture should leave us more conscious of the majesty of God and the limitations of our own understanding.

The purpose of this work has not been to provide the final human word concerning every passage of Second Corinthians.

It has been to direct attention toward the inspired Word of God and the glorious Savior revealed within it.

If these pages have encouraged one discouraged believer, strengthened one struggling pastor, clarified one difficult passage, challenged one compromising Christian, or pointed one lost sinner toward Jesus Christ, then they will have served a meaningful purpose.

May the Lord use this work according to His wisdom and for His glory.

And may every reader remember that the ultimate purpose of biblical study is not merely to know more about God, but to know Him more deeply through His Son, Jesus Christ.

XVI. The Grace That Will Carry Us Home

One day the struggles of this present life will be finished.

The believer will no longer contend with the limitations of a fallen world.

The sorrows of earthly existence will give way to the fullness of the eternal hope promised in Jesus Christ.

The resurrection will demonstrate the complete triumph of the Savior over death.

And the redeemed will dwell forever in the presence of the Lord.

Until that day, the people of God continue their pilgrimage by faith.

There will still be trials.

There will still be disappointments.

There will still be seasons of uncertainty.

There will still be burdens that test our strength and circumstances that expose our weakness.

But there will never be a moment when the Lord ceases to be faithful to His people.

The grace that sustained Paul remains sufficient.

The power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead remains unconquerable.

The promises of God remain certain.

And the Savior who loved us unto death remains worthy of our complete confidence.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16, Paul declared:

> "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

There is the testimony of persevering faith.

The body may weaken.

The years may pass.

Earthly strength may diminish.

But the grace of God continues to sustain the believer.

The Christian's final confidence is not found in the endurance of the flesh, but in the faithfulness of the Lord.

And when the final hour of earthly life arrives, the believer's hope will not depend upon personal achievements, religious reputation, or human ability.

It will rest entirely upon Jesus Christ.

The Savior who died for sinners.

The Lord who rose from the grave.

The King who reigns forever.

The Redeemer who will never abandon His people.

He is our righteousness.

He is our reconciliation.

He is our peace.

He is our hope.

He is our strength.

And He is our eternal salvation.

A FINAL WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

The Strength That Never Fails

As you close this book, I want you to remember one truth above every other lesson presented in these pages:

God's grace does not become less sufficient when your circumstances become more difficult.

The Apostle Paul did not learn the greatness of divine grace by living a life free from suffering.

He learned it through affliction.

Through rejection.

Through disappointment.

Through persecution.

Through weakness.

Through prayers that were answered differently than he had hoped.

And through a thorn that God, in His sovereign wisdom, permitted to remain.

Yet when the story of Paul's suffering is considered in the light of eternity, we discover something remarkable.

The thorn did not have the final word.

The persecution did not have the final word.

The opposition did not have the final word.

The weakness did not have the final word.

Jesus Christ had the final word.

And His word was grace.

Grace sufficient for the burden.

Grace sufficient for the battle.

Grace sufficient for the sorrow.

Grace sufficient for the calling.

Grace sufficient for the journey.

Grace sufficient for every circumstance through which the Lord would lead His servant.

Perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn from Second Corinthians is that we do not need to possess all the strength required for the Christian life.

We need to belong to the Savior whose strength is inexhaustible.

We do not need to understand every circumstance.

We need to trust the God who governs all circumstances.

We do not need to know everything tomorrow will bring.

We need to know the One who holds tomorrow within His sovereign care.

And we do not need to pretend that we are never weak.

We need to recognize that the power of Christ is sufficient in our weakness.

My prayer for every person who reads this commentary is that the message of Second Corinthians will become more than a theological principle.

May it become a living conviction.

When suffering comes, may you remember the God of all comfort.

When opposition arises, may you remain faithful to the truth.

When discouragement threatens, may you look beyond the temporary toward the eternal.

When the world offers its approval in exchange for compromise, may you choose the approval of Christ.

When your strength fails, may you depend upon His grace.

And when the path before you becomes dark, may you continue walking by faith rather than by sight.

For the Christian life is not ultimately the story of what weak human beings accomplish for God.

It is the story of what the Almighty God accomplishes through those who depend upon Him.

The vessel may be broken, but the treasure remains glorious.

The servant may be weary, but the Savior remains strong.

The road may be difficult, but the promises remain sure.

The thorn may remain, but divine grace will never fail.

And when all the struggles of this earthly journey have finally passed, the redeemed will discover that every promise of God in Jesus Christ has been completely fulfilled.

Until that glorious day, let us hold firmly to the words that stand at the center of this commentary:

> **"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."**
>
> — 2 Corinthians 12:9 (KJV)

May these words encourage the brokenhearted, strengthen the weary, humble the proud, and remind every child of God that the power of the Christian life belongs to Jesus Christ alone.

And may we say with the Apostle Paul:

> **"For when I am weak, then am I strong."**
>
> — 2 Corinthians 12:10 (KJV)

When human strength ends, God's grace remains.

When earthly power fails, Christ is still sufficient.

And when the final chapter of our earthly lives has been written, the glory will belong to God alone.

With gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ, whose grace is sufficient for every weakness and whose truth endures forever.

Dr. Paul Crawford
Author and Founder, Crawford Bible Commentary

Power in Weakness: God's Strength in a Broken World
A Comprehensive Verse-by-Verse Commentary on Second Corinthians

SOLI DEO GLORIA
To God Alone Be the Glory

AMEN.

A Closing Prayer

“Father, I thank You for every reader who has walked through these pages. For the one who does not yet know You, I pray they would hear Your voice and receive Your Son, Jesus, as Lord and Savior. For the one who already believes, I pray You would set their heart ablaze with urgency—to speak, to share, to love, and to never be silent. May we all live as faithful watchmen, sounding the trumpet until the day You call us home. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen.”

THE BIBLE WAY TO HEAVEN

1. Admit you are a sinner.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

No one is good enough to go to Heaven on his own merit.

No matter how much good we do, we still come short.

2. Realize the penalty for sin.

"For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a)

Just as there are wages for good, there is punishment for wrong.

The penalty for our sin is eternal death in a place called Hell.

3. Believe that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again for you.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9)

4. Trust Christ alone as your Saviour.

"...But the gift of God is eternal life though Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23b)

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Eternal life is a gift purchased by the blood of Jesus and offered freely to those who call upon Him by faith.

Anyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved forever. Being saved is a one-time event.

Dr. Paul Crawford is more than just a Christian Author; His books are a source of inspiration and guidance on your spiritual journey. His books are created with a deep sense of faith and a desire to uplift and inspire all who read.

POWER IN WEAKNESS

God's Strength in a Broken World

A Comprehensive Verse-by-Verse Commentary on Second Corinthians

In Second Corinthians, the Apostle Paul opens his heart with unmatched honesty, courage, and passion. It is a letter of defense, encouragement, and deep spiritual insight—written by a man who knew suffering, opposition, and weakness, yet also the overflowing strength and grace of God.

Power in Weakness takes you through every verse of Second Corinthians, providing clear exposition, practical application, and timeless truth for believers who are living in a broken and challenging world. Dr. Paul Crawford brings biblical depth, doctrinal clarity, and real-life relevance to this powerful New Testament letter.

IN THIS COMMENTARY YOU WILL DISCOVER:

- The sufficiency of God's grace in life's trials (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- How God's power is made perfect in human weakness
- The true marks of a genuine ministry
- The comfort of God in the midst of affliction
- The glory of the new covenant in Christ
- Practical encouragement for faithful living today

Whether you are a pastor, student of the Bible, or a believer seeking a deeper understanding of God's Word, ***Power in Weakness*** will strengthen your faith, increase your confidence in God's grace, and remind you that His power is often displayed most clearly in our greatest weakness.

DR. PAUL CRAWFORD