



The Book Of Second Corinthians

Paul Is Honest And
Straight Forward With
The Church

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2 Corinthians

OVERVIEW:

Paul constantly struggled with those who would mislead God's people, and he poured his life into spreading the Good News to the uttermost parts of the world. During three missionary trips and other travels, he proclaimed Christ, made converts, and established churches. But often young believers were easy prey for false teachers. False teachers were a constant threat to the gospel and the early church. So Paul had to spend much time warning and correcting these new Christians.

The church at Corinth was weak. Surrounded by idolatry and immorality, they struggled with their Christian faith and life-style. Through personal visits and letters, Paul tried to instruct them in the faith, resolve their conflicts, and solve some of their problems. First Corinthians was sent to deal with specific moral issues in the church and to answer questions about sex, marriage, and tender consciences. That letter confronted the issues directly and was well received by most. But there were false teachers who denied Paul's authority and slandered him. Paul then wrote 2 Corinthians to defend his position and to denounce those who were twisting the truth.

Second Corinthians must have been a difficult letter for Paul to write because he had to list his credentials as an apostle. Paul was reluctant to do so as a humble servant of Christ, but he knew it was necessary. Paul also knew that most of the believers in Corinth had taken his previous words to heart and were beginning to mature in their faith. He affirmed their commitment to Christ.

Second Corinthians begins with Paul reminding his readers of (1) his relationship to them—Paul had always been honest and straightforward with them (2 Cor. 1:12-14), (2) his itinerary—he was planning to visit them again (2 Cor. 1:15-2:3), and (3) his previous letter (2 Cor. 2:4-11). Paul then moves directly to the subject of false teachers (2 Cor. 2:17), and he reviews his ministry among the Corinthians to demonstrate the validity of his message and to urge them not to turn away from the truth (2 Cor. 3:1-7:16).

Paul next turns to the issue of collecting money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. He tells them how others have given, and he urges them to show their love in a tangible way as well (2 Cor. 8:1-9:15). Paul then gives a strong defense of

his authority as a genuine apostle while pointing out the deceptive influence of the false apostles (2 Cor. 10:1-13:13).

As you read this intensely personal letter, listen to Paul's words of love and exhortation, and be committed to the truth of God's Word and prepared to reject all false teaching.

THE BLUEPRINT

In responding to the attacks on his character and authority, Paul explains the nature of Christian ministry and, as an example, openly shares about his ministry. This is an important letter for all who wish to be involved in any kind of Christian ministry, because it has much to teach us about how we should handle our ministries today. Like Paul, those involved in ministry should be blameless, sincere, confident, caring, open, and willing to suffer for the sake of Christ.

1. Paul explains his actions (2 Cor. 1:1-2:11)

This letter is from Paul, appointed by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our dear brother Timothy.

We are writing to God's church in Corinth and to all the Christians throughout Greece.

[2] May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you his grace and peace.

[3] All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of every mercy and the God who comforts us. [4] He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. [5] You can be sure that the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. [6] So when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your benefit and salvation! For when God comforts us, it is so that we, in turn, can be an encouragement to you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. [7] We are confident that as you share in suffering, you will also share God's comfort.

[8] I think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and completely overwhelmed, and we thought we would never live through it. [9] In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we learned not to rely on ourselves, but on God who can raise the dead. [10] And he did deliver us from mortal danger. And we are confident that he will continue to deliver us. [11] He will rescue us because you are helping by praying for us. As a result, many will give

thanks to God because so many people's prayers for our safety have been answered.

[12] We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have been honest and sincere in all our dealings. We have depended on God's grace, not on our own earthly wisdom. That is how we have acted toward everyone, and especially toward you. [13] My letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can't understand. I hope someday you will fully understand us, [14] even if you don't fully understand us now. Then on the day when our Lord Jesus comes back again, you will be proud of us in the same way we are proud of you.

[15] Since I was so sure of your understanding and trust, I wanted to give you a double blessing. [16] I wanted to stop and see you on my way to Macedonia and again on my return trip. Then you could send me on my way to Judea.

[17] You may be asking why I changed my plan. Hadn't I made up my mind yet? Or am I like people of the world who say yes when they really mean no? [18] As surely as God is true, I am not that sort of person. My yes means yes [19] because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, never wavers between yes and no. He is the one whom Timothy, Silas, and I preached to you, and he is the divine Yes—God's affirmation. [20] For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in him. That is why we say "Amen" when we give glory to God through Christ.

[21] It is God who gives us, along with you, the ability to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, [22] and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment of everything he will give us.

[23] Now I call upon God as my witness that I am telling the truth. The reason I didn't return to Corinth was to spare you from a severe rebuke. [24] But that does not mean we want to tell you exactly how to put your faith into practice. We want to work together with you so you will be full of joy as you stand firm in your faith.

[2:1] So I said to myself, "No, I won't do it. I won't make them unhappy with another painful visit." [2] For if I cause you pain and make you sad, who is going to make me glad? [3] That is why I wrote as I did in my last letter, so that when I do come, I will not be made sad by the very ones who ought to give me the greatest joy. Surely you know that my happiness depends on

your happiness. [4] How painful it was to write that letter! Heartbroken, I cried over it. I didn't want to hurt you, but I wanted you to know how very much I love you.

[5] I am not overstating it when I say that the man who caused all the trouble hurt your entire church more than he hurt me. [6] He was punished enough when most of you were united in your judgment against him. [7] Now it is time to forgive him and comfort him. Otherwise he may become so discouraged that he won't be able to recover. [8] Now show him that you still love him.

[9] I wrote to you as I did to find out how far you would go in obeying me. [10] When you forgive this man, I forgive him, too. And when I forgive him (for whatever is to be forgiven), I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, [11] so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are very familiar with his evil schemes.

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

Well, when I came to the city of Troas to preach the Good News of Christ, the Lord gave me tremendous opportunities. [13] But I couldn't rest because my dear brother Titus hadn't yet arrived with a report from you. So I said good-bye and went on to Macedonia to find him.

[14] But thanks be to God, who made us his captives and leads us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume. [15] Our lives are a fragrance presented by Christ to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those being saved and by those perishing. [16] To those who are perishing we are a fearful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved we are a life-giving perfume. And who is adequate for such a task as this? [17] You see, we are not like those hucksters—and there are many of them—who preach just to make

money. We preach God's message with sincerity and with Christ's authority. And we know that the God who sent us is watching us.

[3:1] Are we beginning again to tell you how good we are? Some people need to bring letters of recommendation with them or ask you to write letters of recommendation for them. [2] But the only letter of recommendation we need is you yourselves! Your lives are a letter written in our hearts, and everyone can read it and recognize our good work among you. [3] Clearly, you are a letter from Christ prepared by us. It is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on stone, but on human hearts.

[4] We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. [5] It is not that we think we can do anything of lasting value by ourselves. Our only power and success come from God. [6] He is the one who has enabled us to represent his new covenant. This is a covenant, not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old way ends in death; in the new way, the Holy Spirit gives life.

[7] That old system of law etched in stone led to death, yet it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away. [8] Shouldn't we expect far greater glory when the Holy Spirit is giving life? [9] If the old covenant, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new covenant, which makes us right with God! [10] In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new covenant. [11] So if the old covenant, which has been set aside, was full of glory, then the new covenant, which remains forever, has far greater glory.

[12] Since this new covenant gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. [13] We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory fading away. [14] But the people's minds were hardened, and even to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, a veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ. [15] Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand.

[16] But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, then the veil is taken away. [17] Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom. [18] And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.

[4:1] And so, since God in his mercy has given us this wonderful ministry, we never give up. [2] We reject all shameful and underhanded methods. We do not try to trick anyone, and we do not distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know that.

[3] If the Good News we preach is veiled from anyone, it is a sign that they are perishing. [4] Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them. They don't understand the message we preach about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

[5] We don't go around preaching about ourselves; we preach Christ Jesus, the Lord. All we say about ourselves is that we are your servants because of what Jesus has done for us. [6] For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made us understand that this light is the brightness of the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

[7] But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shine within us—is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own.

[8] We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed, but we don't give up and quit. [9] We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going. [10] Through suffering, these bodies of ours constantly share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

[11] Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be obvious in our dying bodies. [12] So we live in the face of death, but it has resulted in eternal life for you.

[13] But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, "I believed in God, and so I speak." [14] We know that the same God who raised our Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself along with you. [15] All of these things are for your benefit. And as God's grace brings more and more people to Christ, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.

[16] That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. [17] For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! [18] So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look

forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.

[5:1] For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have a home in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. [2] We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long for the day when we will put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing.

[3] For we will not be spirits without bodies, but we will put on new heavenly bodies. [4] Our dying bodies make us groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and have no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by everlasting life. [5] God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.

[6] So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. [7] That is why we live by believing and not by seeing. [8] Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. [9] So our aim is to please him always, whether we are here in this body or away from this body. [10] For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in our bodies.

[11] It is because we know this solemn fear of the Lord that we work so hard to persuade others. God knows we are sincere, and I hope you know this, too. [12] Are we trying to pat ourselves on the back again? No, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us, so you can answer those who brag about having a spectacular ministry rather than having a sincere heart before God. [13] If it seems that we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. [14] Whatever we do, it is because Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for everyone, we also believe that we have all died to the old life we used to live. [15] He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. Instead, they will live to please Christ, who died and was raised for them.

[16] So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now! [17] What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!

[18] All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him.

[19] For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. [20] We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!" [21] For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

[6:1] As God's partners, we beg you not to reject this marvelous message of God's great kindness. [2] For God says,

"At just the right time, I heard you.
On the day of salvation, I helped you."

Indeed, God is ready to help you right now. Today is the day of salvation.

[3] We try to live in such a way that no one will be hindered from finding the Lord by the way we act, and so no one can find fault with our ministry. [4] In everything we do we try to show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. [5] We have been beaten, been put in jail, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. [6] We have proved ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, our sincere love, and the power of the Holy Spirit. [7] We have faithfully preached the truth. God's power has been working in us. We have righteousness as our weapon, both to attack and to defend ourselves. [8] We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. [9] We are well known, but we are treated as unknown. We live close to death, but here we are, still alive. We have been beaten within an inch of our lives. [10] Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.

[11] Oh, dear Corinthian friends! We have spoken honestly with you. Our hearts are open to you. [12] If there is a problem between us, it is not because of a lack of

love on our part, but because you have withheld your love from us. [13] I am talking now as I would to my own children. Open your hearts to us!

[14] Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can goodness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? [15] What harmony can there be between Christ and the Devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? [16] And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

"I will live in them
and walk among them.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

[17] Therefore, come out from them
and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord.

Don't touch their filthy things,
and I will welcome you.

[18] And I will be your Father,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."

[7:1] Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete purity because we fear God.

[2] Please open your hearts to us. We have not done wrong to anyone. We have not led anyone astray. We have not taken advantage of anyone. [3] I'm not saying this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts forever. We live or die together with you. [4] I have the highest confidence in you, and my pride in you is great. You have greatly encouraged me; you have made me happy despite all our troubles.

[5] When we arrived in Macedonia there was no rest for us. Outside there was conflict from every direction, and inside there was fear. [6] But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. [7] His presence was a joy, but so was the news he brought of the encouragement he received from you. When he told me how much you were looking forward to my visit, and how sorry you were about what had happened, and how loyal your love is for me, I was filled with joy!

[8] I am no longer sorry that I sent that letter to you, though I was sorry for a time, for I know that it was painful to you for a little while. [9] Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to have remorse and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way. [10] For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. But sorrow without repentance is the kind that results in death.

[11] Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish the wrongdoer. You showed that you have done everything you could to make things right. [12] My purpose was not to write about who did the wrong or who was wronged. I wrote to you so that in the sight of God you could show how much you really do care for us. [13] We have been encouraged by this.

In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was at the way you welcomed him and set his mind at ease. [14] I had told him how proud I was of you—and you didn't disappoint me. I have always told you the truth, and now my boasting to Titus has also proved true! [15] Now he cares for you more than ever when he remembers the way you listened to him and welcomed him with such respect and deep concern. [16] I am very happy now because I have complete confidence in you.

3. Paul defends the collection (2 Cor. 8:1-9:15)

Now I want to tell you, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done for the churches in Macedonia. [2] Though they have been going through much trouble and hard times, their wonderful joy and deep poverty have overflowed in rich generosity. [3] For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford but far more. And they did it of their own free will. [4] They begged us again and again for the gracious privilege of sharing in the gift for the Christians in Jerusalem.

[5] Best of all, they went beyond our highest hopes, for their first action was to dedicate themselves to the Lord and to us for whatever directions God might give them.

[6] So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to complete your share in this ministry of giving. [7] Since you excel in so many ways—you have so much faith, such gifted speakers, such knowledge, such enthusiasm, and such love for us—now I want you to excel also in this gracious ministry of giving. [8] I am not saying you must do it, even though the other churches are eager to do it. This is one way to prove your love is real.

[9] You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was very rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.

[10] I suggest that you finish what you started a year ago, for you were the first to propose this idea, and you were the first to begin doing something about it. [11] Now you should carry this project through to completion just as enthusiastically as you began it. Give whatever you can according to what you have.

[12] If you are really eager to give, it isn't important how much you are able to give. God wants you to give what you have, not what you don't have. [13] Of course, I don't mean you should give so much that you suffer from having too little. I only mean that there should be some equality. [14] Right now you have plenty and can help them. Then at some other time they can share with you when you need it. In this way, everyone's needs will be met. [15] Do you remember what the Scriptures say about this? "Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough."

[16] I am thankful to God that he has given Titus the same enthusiasm for you that I have. [17] He welcomed our request that he visit you again. In fact, he

himself was eager to go and see you. [18] We are also sending another brother with Titus. He is highly praised in all the churches as a preacher of the Good News. [19] He was appointed by the churches to accompany us as we take the offering to Jerusalem—a service that glorifies the Lord and shows our eagerness to help. [20] By traveling together we will guard against any suspicion, for we are anxious that no one should find fault with the way we are handling this generous gift. [21] We are careful to be honorable before the Lord, but we also want everyone else to know we are honorable.

[22] And we are also sending with them another brother who has been thoroughly tested and has shown how earnest he is on many occasions. He is now even more enthusiastic because of his increased confidence in you.

[23] If anyone asks about Titus, say that he is my partner who works with me to help you. And these brothers are representatives of the churches. They are splendid examples of those who bring glory to Christ. [24] So show them your love, and prove to all the churches that our boasting about you is justified.

[9:1] I really don't need to write to you about this gift for the Christians in Jerusalem. [2] For I know how eager you are to help, and I have been boasting to our friends in Macedonia that you Christians in Greece were ready to send an offering a year ago. In fact, it was your enthusiasm that stirred up many of them to begin helping. [3] But I am sending these brothers just to be sure that you really are ready, as I told them you would be, with your money all collected. I don't want it to turn out that I was wrong in my boasting about you.

[4] I would be humiliated—and so would you—if some Macedonian Christians came with me, only to find that you still weren't ready after all I had told them! [5] So I thought I should send these brothers ahead of me to make sure the gift you promised is ready. But I want it to be a willing gift, not one given under pressure.

[6] Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. [7] You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully. [8] And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. [9] As the Scriptures say,

"Godly people give generously to the poor.
Their good deeds will never be forgotten."

[10] For God is the one who gives seed to the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will give you many opportunities to do good, and he will produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

[11] Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out in thanksgiving to God. [12] So two good things will happen—the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanksgiving to God. [13] You will be glorifying God through your generous gifts. For your generosity to them will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. [14] And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the wonderful grace of God shown through you.

[15] Thank God for his Son—a gift too wonderful for words!

4. Paul defends his authority (2 Cor. 10:1-13:13)

Now I, Paul, plead with you. I plead with the gentleness and kindness that Christ himself would use, even though some of you say I am bold in my letters but timid in person. [2] I hope it won't be necessary, but when I come I may have to be very bold with those who think we act from purely human motives. [3] We are human, but we don't wage war with human plans and methods. [4] We use God's mighty weapons, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil's strongholds. [5] With these weapons we break down every proud argument that keeps people from knowing God. With these weapons we conquer their rebellious ideas, and we teach them to obey Christ. [6] And we will punish those who remained disobedient after the rest of you became loyal and obedient.

[7] The trouble with you is that you make your decisions on the basis of appearance. You must recognize that we belong to Christ just as much as those who proudly declare that they belong to Christ. [8] I may seem to be boasting too much about the authority given to us by the Lord. But this authority is to build you up, not to tear you down. And I will not be put to shame by having my work among you destroyed.

[9] Now this is not just an attempt to frighten you by my letters. [10] For some say, "Don't worry about Paul. His letters are demanding and forceful, but in person he is weak, and his speeches are really bad!" [11] The ones who say this must realize that we will be just as demanding and forceful in person as we are in our letters.

[12] Oh, don't worry; I wouldn't dare say that I am as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are! But they are only comparing themselves with each other, and measuring themselves by themselves. What foolishness!

[13] But we will not boast of authority we do not have. Our goal is to stay within the boundaries of God's plan for us, and this plan includes our working there with you. [14] We are not going too far when we claim authority over you, for we were the first to travel all the way to you with the Good News of Christ. [15] Nor do we claim credit for the work someone else has done. Instead, we hope that your faith will grow and that our work among you will be greatly enlarged. [16] Then we will be able to go and preach the Good News in other places that are far beyond you, where no one else is working. Then there will be no question about being in someone else's territory. [17] As the Scriptures say,

"The person who wishes to boast
should boast only of what the Lord has done."

[18] When people boast about themselves, it doesn't count for much. But when the Lord commends someone, that's different!

[11:1] I hope you will be patient with me as I keep on talking like a fool. Please bear with me. [2] I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. For I promised you as a pure bride to one husband, Christ. [3] But I fear that somehow you will be led away from your pure and simple devotion to Christ, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent. [4] You seem to believe whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach about a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed. [5] But I don't think I am inferior to these "super apostles." [6] I may not be a trained speaker, but I know what I am talking about. I think you realize this by now, for we have proved it again and again.

[7] Did I do wrong when I humbled myself and honored you by preaching God's Good News to you without expecting anything in return? [8] I "robbed" other churches by accepting their contributions so I could serve you at no cost. [9] And when I was with you and didn't have enough to live on, I did not ask you to help me. For the brothers who came from Macedonia brought me another gift. I have never yet asked you for any support, and I never will. [10] As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, I will never stop boasting about this all over Greece. [11] Why? Because I don't love you? God knows I do.

[12] But I will continue doing this to cut the ground out from under the feet of those who boast that their work is just like ours. [13] These people are false apostles. They have fooled you by disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. [14] But I am not surprised! Even Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light. [15] So it is no wonder his servants can also do it by pretending to be godly ministers. In the end they will get every bit of punishment their wicked deeds deserve.

[16] Once again, don't think that I have lost my wits to talk like this. But even if you do, listen to me, as you would to a foolish person, while I also boast a little. [17] Such bragging is not something the Lord wants, but I am acting like a fool. [18] And since others boast about their human achievements, I will, too. [19] After all, you, who think you are so wise, enjoy listening to fools! [20] You put up with it when they make you their slaves, take everything you have, take advantage of you, put on airs, and slap you in the face. [21] I'm ashamed to say that we were not strong enough to do that!

But whatever they dare to boast about—I'm talking like a fool again—I can boast about it, too. [22] They say they are Hebrews, do they? So am I. And they say they are Israelites? So am I. And they are descendants of Abraham? So am I. [23] They say they serve Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. [24] Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes.

[25] Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. [26] I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians but are not. [27] I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry

and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

[28] Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of how the churches are getting along. [29] Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?

[30] If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am. [31] God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows I tell the truth. [32] When I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas kept guards at the city gates to catch me. [33] But I was lowered in a basket through a window in the city wall, and that's how I got away!

[12:1] This boasting is all so foolish, but let me go on. Let me tell about the visions and revelations I received from the Lord. [2] I was caught up into the third heaven fourteen years ago. [3] Whether my body was there or just my spirit, I don't know; only God knows. [4] But I do know that I was caught up into paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be told. [5] That experience is something worth boasting about, but I am not going to do it. I am going to boast only about my weaknesses. [6] I have plenty to boast about and would be no fool in doing it, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it. I don't want anyone to think more highly of me than what they can actually see in my life and my message, [7] even though I have received wonderful revelations from God. But to keep me from getting puffed up, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from getting proud.

[8] Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. [9] Each time he said, "My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me. [10] Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

[11] You have made me act like a fool—boasting like this. You ought to be writing commendations for me, for I am not at all inferior to these "super apostles," even though I am nothing at all. [12] When I was with you, I certainly gave you every proof that I am truly an apostle, sent to you by God himself. For I patiently did many signs and wonders and miracles among you. [13] The only thing I didn't do, which I do in the other churches, was to become a burden to you. Please forgive me for this wrong!

[14] Now I am coming to you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I don't want what you have; I want you. And anyway, little children don't pay for their parents' food. It's the other way around; parents supply food for their children. [15] I will gladly spend myself and all I have for your spiritual good, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me.

[16] Some of you admit I was not a burden to you. But they still think I was sneaky and took advantage of you by trickery. [17] But how? Did any of the men I sent to you take advantage of you? [18] When I urged Titus to visit you and sent our other brother with him, did Titus take advantage of you? No, of course not! For we both have the same Spirit and walk in each other's steps, doing things the same way.

[19] Perhaps you think we are saying all this just to defend ourselves. That isn't it at all. We tell you this as Christ's servants, and we know that God is listening. Everything we do, dear friends, is for your benefit. [20] For I am afraid that when I come to visit you I won't like what I find, and then you won't like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfishness, backstabbing, gossip, conceit, and disorderly behavior. [21] Yes, I am afraid that when I come, God will humble me again because of you. And I will have to grieve because many of you who sinned earlier have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure.

[13:1] This is the third time I am coming to visit you. As the Scriptures say, "The facts of every case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." [2] I have already warned those who had been sinning when I was there on my second visit. Now I again warn them and all others, just as I did before, that this next time I will not spare them.

[3] I will give you all the proof you want that Christ speaks through me. Christ is not weak in his dealings with you; he is a mighty power among you. [4] Although he died on the cross in weakness, he now lives by the mighty power of God. We, too, are weak, but we live in him and have God's power—the power we use in dealing with you.

[5] Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine. Test yourselves. If you cannot tell that Jesus Christ is among you, it means you have failed the test. [6] I hope you recognize that we have passed the test and are approved by God.

[7] We pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. We pray this, not to show that our ministry to you has been successful, but because we want you to do

right even if we ourselves seem to have failed. [8] Our responsibility is never to oppose the truth, but to stand for the truth at all times. [9] We are glad to be weak, if you are really strong. What we pray for is your restoration to maturity.

[10] I am writing this to you before I come, hoping that I won't need to deal harshly with you when I do come. For I want to use the authority the Lord has given me to build you up, not to tear you down.

[11] Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Rejoice. Change your ways. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

[12] [12a] Greet each other in Christian love. [13] [12b] All the Christians here send you their greetings.

MEGATHEMES

THEME: Trials

EXPLANATION:

Paul experienced great suffering, persecution, and opposition in his ministry. He even struggled with a personal weakness—a “thorn” in the flesh. Through it all, Paul affirmed God’s faithfulness.

IMPORTANCE:

God is faithful. His strength is sufficient for any trial. When trials come, they keep us from pride and teach us dependence on God. He comforts us so we can comfort others.

THEME: Church discipline

EXPLANATION:

Paul defends his role in church discipline. Neither immorality nor false teaching could be ignored. The church was to be neither too lax nor too severe in administering discipline. The church was to restore the corrected person when he or she repented.

IMPORTANCE:

The goal of all discipline in the church should be correction, not vengeance. For churches to be effective, they must confront and solve problems, not ignore them. In everything, we must act in love.

THEME: Hope

EXPLANATION:

To encourage the Corinthians as they faced trials, Paul reminded them that they would receive new bodies in heaven. This would be a great victory in contrast to their present suffering.

IMPORTANCE:

To know we will receive new bodies offers us hope. No matter what adversity we face, we can keep going. Our faithful service will result in triumph.

THEME: Giving

EXPLANATION:

Paul organized a collection of funds for the poor in the Jerusalem church. Many of the Asian churches gave money. Paul explains and defends his beliefs about giving, and he urges the Corinthians to follow through on their previous commitment.

IMPORTANCE:

Like the Corinthians, we should follow through on our financial commitments. Our giving must be generous, sacrificial, well planned, and based on need. Our generosity not only helps those in need but enables them to thank God.

THEME: Sound doctrine

EXPLANATION:

False teachers were challenging Paul's ministry and authority as an apostle. Paul asserts his authority in order to preserve correct Christian doctrine. His sincerity, his love for Christ, and his concern for the people were his defense.

IMPORTANCE:

We should share Paul's concern for correct teaching in our churches. But in so doing, we must share his motivation—love for Christ and people—and his sincerity.

An invitation is given to open your heart's door.

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*.

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