

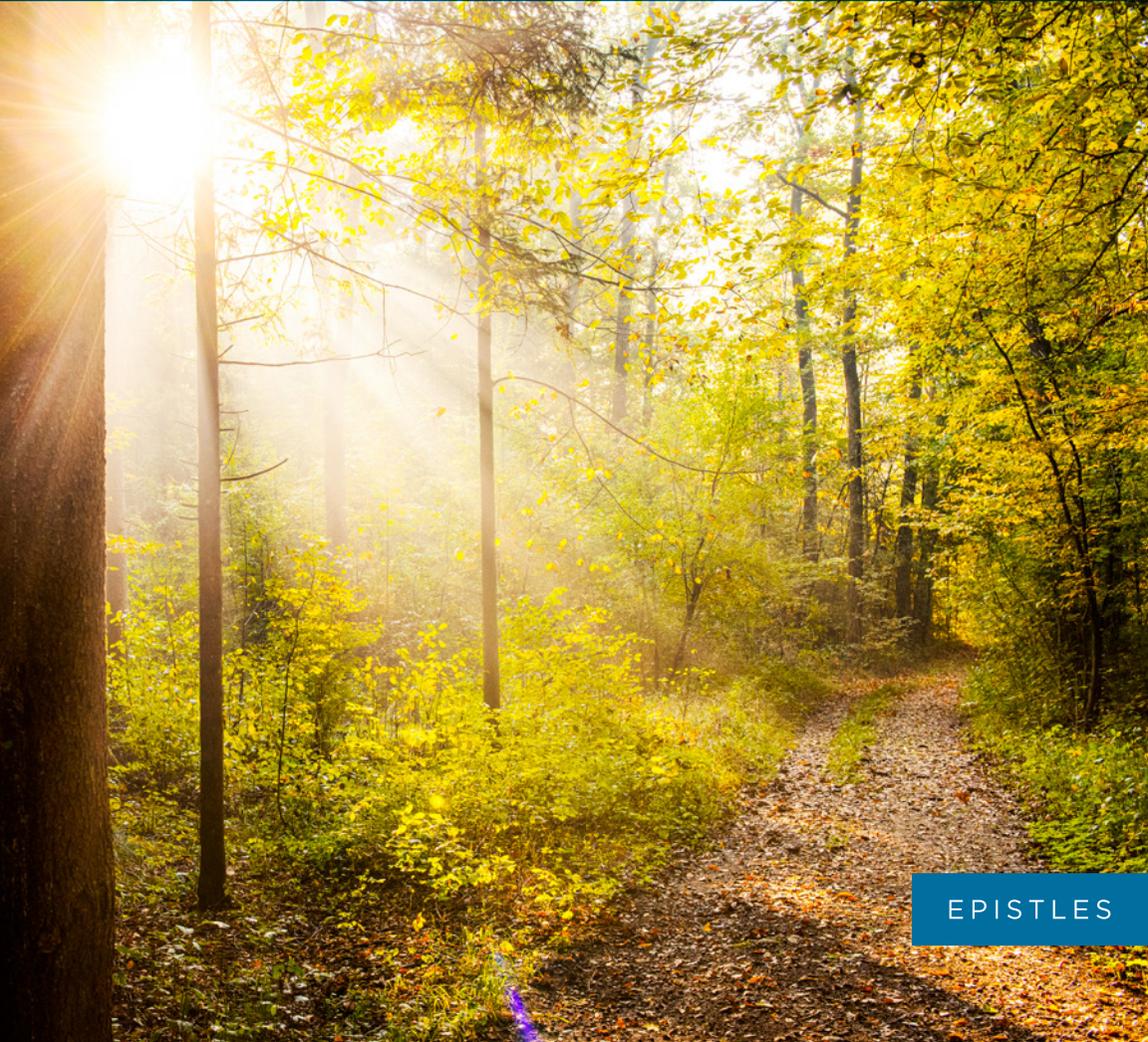


THRU the **BIBLE**

with *J. Vernon McGee*

2 CORINTHIANS

BIBLE COMPANION



EPISTLES

READ THIS FIRST

This Bible Companion is a summary of Dr. J. Vernon McGee's teaching of the book of 2 Corinthians heard on THRU the BIBLE. These summarized lessons get to the heart of Bible passages and are intended to stir your own thinking, prayer, and study.



Begin with prayer. Dr. McGee said, "We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace, when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us." Before you start each lesson, ask the Lord to use it to grow you up in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in that section. Dr. McGee said, "This is the secret of life and of Christian living."



As you study, read the Bible passage first. Invite God to open your eyes and deepen your understanding of His Word. That's a request God loves to answer!



If you want to listen to Dr. McGee's complete teaching on any specific passage, go to TTB.org/2Corinthians (or any book of the Bible).

The corresponding audio messages are listed at the top of the summaries. You can also use this Bible Companion to follow along and take notes while you listen to Dr. McGee teach a book of the Bible on the radio or online.



After every lesson, several questions are listed for your personal consideration or, if you're reading this as a group, for your discussion. Ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what He wants to show you.

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU
RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM AND TEACHING....

COLOSSIANS 3:16^A

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LESSON 1

GOD LOVES TO SHOW MERCY



Begin with prayer



Read **2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13**



Listen at [TTB.org/2Corinthians](https://www.TTB.org/2Corinthians) to **2 Corinthians 1:1-3**, **2 Corinthians 1:4-20**, and **2 Corinthians 1:10–2:13**

If you wonder if the first century church had issues, then take a look at Corinth. This young church struggled to know how to live pure, godly lives in a corrupt culture.

In the first letter we have to Corinth, the apostle Paul called them out on a serious sin issue. He had a special affection for this church because he had started it. But the Christians there had a hard time growing up in the Lord. In the past, their babyish behavior hindered them from receiving God's Word. They didn't want to submit to Paul's authority in the Lord over them. Nor did they want to give up their personal sins. (See 2 Corinthians 10:1–13:10.) But in this case, the young church responded well to Paul's letter and corrected their lives. Just one person continued to give Paul trouble. He was the ringleader of a group who said they had equal authority as Paul.

Earlier, Paul briefly visited the church in Corinth (now in modern Greece) in hopes of correcting the group, but it didn't go well. Then he wrote his second letter (but our 1 Corinthians) called "the severe letter." Gratefully, the church as a whole responded well and even took care of the troublemaker themselves.

Now they wanted Paul to visit them again in person, but it wasn't the right time. He was in Ephesus, 500 miles away in Turkey with the Aegean Sea between them. God was moving in amazing ways in Ephesus. Paul wrote about the "great and effective door ... opened to me" (1 Corinthians 16:9). He couldn't leave Ephesus at this pivotal time for the gospel. Later, Paul traveled with Timothy to Philippi, where he wrote this letter.

Paul's primary purpose in writing 2 Corinthians was to set the troublemaker straight, but God's larger purpose was to clarify the gospel as much as possible. It also encouraged the young church and grew them up in their Christian disciplines. They learned how to call out destructive sin—and then how to restore a repentant sinner. They also learned how to be generous in giving to God's work. This letter also revealed Paul's personal side. He had to defend his own character, his authority as an apostle, and his motives for ministry. Paul invites us to know him personally better in 2 Corinthians than in any other letter.

The letter begins on a high note. Paul knew for certain he was in God's will, and that gave him confidence. It makes no difference *where* you are or *how* you are or *what* your circumstances may be, if you know you are in God's will, you are in a great place. When you are convinced of the truth of God's Word, you can give it out with enthusiasm.

The early churches of the first century all benefitted from this confidence. When they hit hard times, they were sure of God's Word. They rested on it at all times. Did you know that when Paul wrote this letter, he also addresses the church in your neighborhood, which is also God's church? *We are God's church*, the body of believers the Lord Jesus Christ purchased with His blood. The church in Corinth was like every other. When the gospel came to them, the scales fell from their eyes. The light broke on their darkened souls. They turned from their sins to the living Christ. And they went all over witnessing for Christ. They were the body of Christ. And this pleased the Lord.

To equip the Corinthian Christians for hard times, Paul now teaches them about God Himself. His lessons are rich and beautiful, take them to heart. *Don't forget about God's mercies; He is the Father of mercies*, he reminds us. God is the Father; that's His position in the Trinity. He loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son (see John 3:16). "Begotten" describes Jesus' totally unique position in the Trinity. He is the eternal Son, and God is the everlasting Father. If you have a Father and a Son like that, then there never was a time when He had a beginning. Both the Father and the Son are eternal.

As “the Father of mercies,” God provided a Savior for us. We couldn’t be saved any other way. Everything we have today is a mercy from God. He is rich in grace and rich in mercy. Do you need that mercy today? If you need cash, you go to a bank to get it. If you need mercy, go to the One who is the Father of mercies. If you need help, go to Him. We don’t deserve any of it, but He gives it all to us freely.

Our Father is also “the God of all comfort” (1:3)—comfort means “to come alongside of.” The same word describes the Holy Spirit, the *paraclete*, the One called to our side. When the Lord Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, He said He would send a *Helper. He will abide with you forever ... I promise to come to you.* The Spirit of God is called to help you, to strengthen you, to relieve the loneliness, ease the grief, and calm your fears. He is your advocate in time of fear and trouble. He will be with you in the desperate hour of life. (See Psalm 30:10.) When our soul cries out for the Comforter, He comes alongside us. When we know for sure God is with us in all life’s troubles, we can live by faith and not by fear.

Paul knows all about trouble and God’s comfort through it all. He told the Corinthians that when he first was in Asia, the times were so intense he didn’t think they were going to make it. *As it turned out, he said, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally* (see 2 Corinthians 8–10).

Paul’s experience models that God sometimes allows us to have trouble or to be sick. Paul said he felt like he had a death sentence on him (this could have been when he was sick or when he was attacked by a mob in Ephesus). But God delivered them. *And He’ll do it again, rescuing us as many times as we need rescuing,* he added.

God does permit Christians to suffer. He has a good reason, a very wonderful purpose in it all, though we may not see it at the time. He works it all out for the good of those He loves. He intends for it to serve a good purpose so we can comfort someone else. Regardless of what you’re going through, God gives it to you so you can share the blessing with others. Your health, your wealth, your talent, or a gift—He wants you to share it with others. Each issues from the mercy of God. So does suffering. You might not have thought it was goodness and mercy to have a couple of dogs yapping at you to keep you from going to the left or to the right, but it is God’s mercy that keeps us on His path, and He uses trial and difficulty for that purpose.

Paul walks softly through these truths, but he says with great assurance, *God has delivered me from death. And right now, He is delivering me.* And then, without any boasting, he says, *We trust He will yet deliver us.* Paul didn't know that God would, but he believed He would. On that basis, he told them how glad he was that God gave him today and the opportunity to give out the gospel. *Keep praying for me,* he asked.

Life on life—that's how Paul described the work of the ministry. We pray for each other, we help each other in trouble, we learn how to trust God from watching each other go through trouble. Our testimony in life matters. God uses it to show others how to live by faith. We don't rely on our own wisdom, but we live our lives in "simplicity and godly sincerity" (1:12). Suffering, in part, produces this grace. God's mercy produces qualities in our lives that we are to share.

The gospel itself is a big "yes"! It is a glorious, positive gospel. God has done something for us, and it's the best news possible. God means well by you. You have a faithful God, and a sure Lord Jesus Christ. And not only that, you have the indwelling Holy Spirit. One statement summarizes the total ministry of the Holy Spirit today: "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (1:21-22). God establishes you; it is the work of His Spirit. First, He convicts us of sin, of righteousness, and judgment. Then, if when we are convicted, we confess our sin and accept Christ as our Savior, He regenerates us. And now saved, we become His abiding place. He indwells us, is at home in us. He comforts us in our grieving.

In speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit, Paul uses the present tense. This is what He is doing for you *today*. He convicts you, He regenerates you, He indwells you, and He baptizes you.

Too often today the anointing of the Holy Spirit is a neglected truth (see 1 John 2:20, 27). The Holy Spirit wants to teach you. He alone can open the Word of God to you. That is the reason the Bible is a miracle book. The Lord Jesus said to His own men that He still had so much He wanted to teach them, but they weren't ready for it. But when the Spirit of the Truth comes, *He will guide you into all the truth there is. He won't draw attention to Himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen* (see John 16:12-13). He will take from Jesus and deliver it to us. He wants to guide you into all truth.

The Holy Spirit is given to us like earnest money on a piece of property, a deposit that pledges more is coming. In such a way, God gives us the Holy Spirit, telling us more is to follow. Jesus purchased us with His blood. He put down a deposit, which guarantees the saved soul will be delivered safely to the Father. The saved soul is in escrow today.

God has put His Holy Spirit into every believer as a way to show you belong to God. If you belong to God, you will never be lost again. You may stray away, but He will come find you. He is the earnest. He has come into the Christian's life so we can experience the fullness of God. What is it that you need today? Your Father is rich in mercy. Go to Him and ask Him for what you need. Do you need power? Do you need joy? Do you need wisdom? Do you need help? These are comforts—He is the God of all comfort. Paul knew this; he had experienced it. Have you experienced it too?

Earlier we heard that Paul wanted to come see the Corinthians again, but God hadn't led Him back yet. He wanted to give them time to work out the conflict within the church themselves. He had directed them what to do, now they had followed his instructions. *I'm not in charge of how you live out the faith, looking over your shoulders, suspiciously critical*, Paul said. He wanted them to own their own faith and ministry with him as partners.

Paul stayed away from Corinth so that their faith could grow stronger and they would grow up in the Lord. Perhaps this is also why God allows many of us to go through difficulties. He wants us to own our faith.

Since Paul got word they had made the needed course correction, now he could come to them in joy and open his heart to them. Since we're talking about God's mercy, it makes sense that Paul addresses the issue of sin the Corinthian church had been dealing with. A man had been living in gross immorality, yet the church shut their eyes to it, acting like they were spiritual. Paul wrote them (1 Corinthians) to get this matter straightened out. He told them to not have fellowship with this man until he turned from his sin.

And for once the story ends well. The people obeyed Paul; they stopped fellowshiping with the man, which in this case was the right thing to do. The man felt overcome by the Spirit's conviction, and he confessed his sin. Then he turned his back on his sin. Now what should they do?

Forgive him, Paul said. He will feel overwhelmed, not only because of his sin, but because you're distant from him. So now put your arm about him and restore him to your fellowship. (See also Galatians 6:1.) You don't want to discourage him so much that Satan finds an opening for more trouble. The devil will try to push us one way or another.

Remember that we are all capable of any sin. Whatever the other man has done, we are also capable of doing. When a man repents from his sin, restore him in humility. Bring him back into fellowship. This is the glorious ministry of mercy.

In this letter so far, we've seen God's comfort for our life's hardest events. Now we see God's comfort in restoring a sinning saint. Showing mercy gives God great delight.

**NEXT: Bet you didn't know this about the
Ten Commandments**

7. Why was the immorality being committed by one believer in Corinth such a big deal?

LESSON 2

THE VICTORY IS OURS



Begin with prayer



Read **2 Corinthians 2:14–3:18**



Listen at [TTB.org/2Corinthians](https://www.TTB.org/2Corinthians) to **2 Corinthians 2:14–3:14** and **2 Corinthians 3:11-18**

The greatest privilege in the world is to give out the Word of God. Do you know why? Because Jesus Christ always wins, and we win with Him. He is the power behind every effective ministry.

In a dramatic picture, Paul describes this ministry of the gospel like leading a military parade. In first century culture, after a military campaign got victory on some distant battleground, the Roman armies returned to Rome in a big, triumphal entry into the city. Sometimes that parade would begin in the morning and go on long into the night. They would put on display everything they had captured—animals, prisoners, etc. At the front of the procession would be the people who would be released to become Roman citizens, and in the back walked the captives who would be executed.

These Roman triumphal entries always included burning incense to their gods to whom they gave credit for the victory. All the way through the procession, clouds of smoke from the incense would travel with the procession as it passed by.

With this as a background, Paul said, *It's God who leads us in triumph in Christ* (2:14). You can't lose when you are in Christ. *Really, Paul? Always? In every place?* Paul had great success in Ephesus but didn't do so well in Athens. Did you triumph in both places? Yes, Paul says, *He always leads us in victory in Christ*. Even when no one comes to Christ? *Even then*, Paul says. In that triumphal Roman entry, some captives were going to be set free and some were going to be executed—but all of them walked in the victory parade.

This is an overwhelming thought and, to be honest, not one of us is up to the task of representing Christ. We have to remember it's God who gets the victory. We're not enough for this assignment. The greatest privilege in the world is to give out the Word of God, because it's a work of God whatever happens next.

When the gospel is preached and the multitudes accept Christ, we see the triumph. We are a “fragrance of life” to those who are saved. But to the crowd who rejects Christ, we smell like death. Regardless of our destiny, we are in the great triumphal entry of Jesus Christ because He is the winner. Every knee will bow to Him someday—either as their Savior or their Judge.

Today the incense is ascending; the Word is going out. And we are a savor of life to some and a savor of death to others.

The Word goes out today, but some mishandle it. Paul reminds us that we speak in Christ. Our mission, really the entire plan of Christian ministry, is to speak in Christ. We need to share God's Word responsibly, not water it down or peddle it cheap. When we speak God's Word, we should picture ourselves standing in Jesus Christ's presence, saying what He wants said. And we can picture Him smiling when we give it out sincerely as the Spirit of God reveals the Bible's truth to us.

We are living letters, God says, *communicating His message*. God's truth is written on our hearts and people read our lives. God's stamp of approval is the proof that any ministry is effective. God wants His Word preached; we can be confident of His approval. He energizes us to share His Word. He is where our strength comes from.

More than in any other book, Paul shares how he is grateful for his weakness because it allows God to shine. When he is weak, God is strong. Same for us. God isn't looking for some big somebody to share His Word. If He had wanted that, He couldn't use you. God chooses the insignificant things of this world to accomplish His purposes. We have enough from God to serve Him well.

Where do we get the strength to be “ministers of the new covenant?” We’re no longer teaching the Old Testament, but we have a new message from God. It’s “not of the letter but of the Spirit” (3:6). In the Old Testament, the letter of the Law condemns us, saying we are guilty sinners. Those letters which were written on the tablets of stone (the Ten Commandments) condemn us. It never gave life, but now God’s Spirit gives us life.

There is nothing wrong with the Law. The problem is with us. It shows us we are sinners. On the day Moses delivered the Law, his face was so bright they couldn’t look at it. But it soon faded. How much more dazzling, then, is God’s Spirit that brings righteousness? This new covenant declares believers free of guilt and sets us apart for God’s special purpose. And this is a permanent glory that remains with us. This is the day of grace! The Old Testament was glorious, but the New Testament is so much more so because of the righteousness we have in Christ Jesus.

Do you remember that God gave Moses the Law two times? The first time God gave Moses the tablets of stone; *He* Himself wrote the Law on them. This was the Law the children of Israel were to live by and actually be judged and saved by (but no one could keep it). While Moses was up on the mountain with God, the children of Israel were already breaking the first two commandments: “You shall have no other gods before Me” and “you shall not make for yourself a carved image...” (Exodus 20:3, 4).

The Mosaic Law was a very strict, rigid law. It demanded an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, burning for burning, and cutting for cutting. It was absolute, intrinsic righteousness and holiness. Whatever a man deserved according to the Law, that’s what he got. In Exodus 32 the people were already breaking the Law. What’s going to happen?

God told Moses to go down to the people. Even from a distance, Moses could see the children of Israel breaking the first two commandments, and he didn’t dare bring the tables of the Law into the camp. Why not? If he had, the entire nation of Israel would have been judged that moment, because the breaking of those laws meant instant death. So Moses smashed those tablets of stone and went into the camp.

The second time Moses goes back to the top of Mount Sinai and into God’s presence, something has happened. Moses recognizes that all Israel should be destroyed because of their sin, but he asks God for mercy. So God gives them a second chance and gives Moses the second tables of the Law.

When Moses came down from the mountain the second time, there was *joy* in his heart and his face *shone*. Now there was a way for the children of Israel to come into the presence of God through the sacrificial system. God has tempered the Law with mercy and grace. At the very heart of the Mosaic system is to be a tabernacle and a sacrificial system that will be the basis of how to approach God. “Without shedding of blood there is no remission” of sin (Hebrews 9:22). But without holiness, no man is going to see God (see Hebrews 12:14). God will have to make a way for us to go into His presence—and He did.

The Ten Commandments demanded a righteousness from us that we can't produce by ourselves. The sacrifice of the tabernacle system was God's grace for the Old Testament, and the death and resurrection of Christ is God's grace for us all. We don't have our own righteousness (like the Law proves), but through faith in Jesus Christ and the grace of God, we have His righteousness (see also Philippians 3:9). This is the glorious *gospel*.

The Law was glorious in that it gave man a way of salvation that pleased God, but no one could fulfill its demands. The Law was death to us because we are lost. But God wants to save man—it makes Him happy. (See Micah 7:18 and Ezekiel 33:11.) He loves us and delights in mercy.

After a bit, Moses' face began to lose its shine, so he put a veil over it so people wouldn't see the glory fading away. And they didn't notice that behind the veil, there's nothing there. The veil that Moses wore on his face is now a veil on the minds of God's ancient people. It is still there, because they refused to see Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Law for righteousness. They're still blind. When they read the Law, they actually think they are able to keep it.

But today, in the day of grace, even the weakest saint who trusts Jesus has absolute assurance that God accepts him in Christ. But we've got heart trouble; we're blinded by the sin in our lives. But when we willingly turn from our sin and receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior, “the veil is taken away” (3:16). Only the Spirit of God can lift the veil and help us to see that Christ is the Savior. He alone can do that.

Now as believers we look at the Lord Jesus Christ. But even as believers, our eyes are veiled when we allow sin in our lives. But when that sin is confessed and we're back in fellowship with Him, we look to Him. Then, with

an “unveiled face,” we behold the glory of the Lord *until* we are transformed. Then we can reflect His image with a little more glory all the time, and our lives gradually become brighter and more beautiful as we become like Him.

That is why you need to stay in the Word of God and keep looking at the Lord Jesus. As you behold Him, you are transformed. The Word of God does more than regenerate you—in the Word of God we see how wonderful Jesus really is, the unveiled *Christ*.

Do you want to be more Christ-like? Then spend time looking at Him in God’s Word.

NEXT: How to make your walk match your talk.

7. It is easy to become tolerant of sin in our own lives. What can other people in the body of Christ do to help you unveil those sins?

LESSON 3

JESUS DID IT ALL



Begin with prayer



Read **2 Corinthians 4**



Listen at [TTB.org/2Corinthians](https://www.TTB.org/2Corinthians) to **2 Corinthians 4:1-6** and **2 Corinthians 4:3-18**

We're in high elevation now as we travel the heights of the Bible. And 2 Corinthians calls us to go even higher.

We've seen God's comfort for life's pain in chapter 1. Then we looked at God's comfort in restoring sinning saints in chapter 2. In chapter 3, we were touched by God's comfort in the glorious ministry of Christ. We're going to stay up here in the heights a little longer as we look at God's comfort when we suffer for Christ.

No one could have or would have invented the gospel. It had to have come from God. All the religions of the world say you must "do." Only the gospel of Jesus Christ says, "done." The gospel tells you God has done something for you. The only way you can come to Him is by faith (see Hebrews 11:6). In contrast, the religions of this world all say, "work harder."

Some religions say you must have faith, but they define it as acknowledging that Jesus lived and died 2,000 years ago as a historical fact. But this fact won't save you. Instead, you must believe Jesus Christ died *for* our *sins* and rose again, according to the Scriptures. We must put all our confidence in Jesus' finished work. The work of our salvation is done. Jesus did it all.

At one time, the apostle Paul knew what it was like to be under the Law. He knew all about the system of “do, do, do”—after all, he was “a Hebrew of the Hebrews.” Before he met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he really hoped he could work out his salvation. But once Paul stood in Jesus’ presence, he knew he could never make it on his own. Any righteousness he might have by the Law would never be enough. He needed the Lord. Paul says it was a new day for him. (See Philippians 3:8-9.)

It’s a new day for each of us, too, when we finally face how much we need God’s mercy. And because He loves us, He loves to give it to us. In His mercy, He provides a Savior for us, and now He saves us by His grace. That’s Him being wonderful!

We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus. However, after we have been saved, that gospel must live in us. We ought to be a living example of the gospel. We need to talk about the truth openly—clearly and candidly. When we can do that, we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in God’s presence.

Our behavior should not contradict what we are preaching. We should act in a way Jesus would approve of. Not in hypocrisy. Not unrealistically pious. We’re not perfect, but we should walk in a way that pleases the Lord.

We are not to handle the Word of God deceitfully. Why do you preach? For money? You say you preach because you love people (see 1 Corinthians 9:16). A person can preach the gospel and say things that are absolutely true, but at the same time his life is broadcasting another message. It’s a glorious thing to preach the gospel, but it’s an awful thing to preach it if underneath you don’t believe it or aren’t committed to Jesus Christ or have a commitment and conviction about Him.

This also follows for those who serve as Christian laymen. Do you want to be a witness for Christ? Well, you already are! Our lives testify either for or against Christ. The man in the pulpit is to train people for the work of the ministry. The person in the pew is to do that work.

By the way, are you doing something to get out the Word of God? Intentionally, actually doing something? God may have given you the gift of making money. Do you use it to send out the Word of God? Perhaps you are a person of prayer, interceding for those who preach and teach the Word of God. Do you realize you have a connection with someone no one

else can reach? Maybe you can connect with someone who won't listen to anyone else. God has called you to be a witness. This is tremendous opportunity and responsibility!

Have you ever heard someone say, "I don't understand the gospel. I have heard it all my life, but it doesn't mean anything to me"? Satan has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. The light is shining, but the devil has his fingers in front of their eyes so they can't see.

Other people say, "I just can't believe some of the things in the Bible." The truth is, it's a wonderful gospel that reveals the glory of Christ, but this person just doesn't want to believe. Maybe there's *sin* in his life—sin the Bible condemns—and they just don't want to admit it. The problem isn't with the Bible; the problem is with their lives. If you choose to indulge your sins, then it's your loss. You can turn to Christ if you will. And when you're ready to turn away from your sin and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, the light of God's Word floods your life and you'll have no difficulty believing.

Satan blinds people from this glorious truth. He's an enemy that opposes the gospel. We just need to remember that the gospel is not about us, but we're proclaiming Jesus Christ. When we come to Him, He floods our lives with so much light that we understand our relationship with Him in new and beautiful ways. He shines His light in our hearts, so we see God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Here's a beautiful picture—just as the Spirit of God brooded over the waters in creation (see Genesis 1), so His Spirit broods over a soul. He moves in to convict our hearts. Then as we respond in faith, He gives us new life and makes us His child. And the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, shines in and transforms us to look like Him. Isn't that a beautiful picture!

See yourself correctly. You are just an "earthen vessel" (4:7)—a clay pot. But we carry this glorious gospel around in our little clay pot. We don't tell others about our story, but about His story. We need to glorify Jesus Christ in our testimony, or there's no point in telling it. We're just servants, that's the best that can be said of us. No one would ever confuse God's brilliance with ours. We point to Him.

The apostle Paul knew what it was to suffer for Jesus' sake. That vessel had to be broken. Not many people are willing to serve out of a broken pot, but we can't have our way *and* His way in our lives. We need to make up our minds whether we are going to follow Him or not.

Paul compares his difficult situation in degrees, and we can all relate. "We are hard-pressed ... yet not crushed." He was pressed for room, but still has room to preach the gospel. He was pushed to a corner in hand-to-hand combat, but he still could turn to God. He was unable to find a way out—"perplexed"—but God led him out. He was "persecuted," pursued by enemies, but he was "not forsaken"—not overtaken by them. Even when Paul was in prison the Lord stood by him. (See Philippians 1:12-13.) He was "struck down, but not destroyed." The enemy got him down, but the enemy didn't destroy him (4:8-9).

Paul seems to be fighting a losing battle. And yet, in his weakness, he is *strong*. If we could have seen this broken, weak, sick, Jewish man up against the mighty juggernaut of Roman power, we would have thought he was *nothing*. But he brought a message that *withered* the Roman Empire. Paul seemed so weak, yet God delivered him again and again. He used miraculous means and natural means. God will never forsake His servants.

Paul talked a lot about dying daily. (See 1 Corinthians 15:31, Romans 8:36, and 1 Corinthians 4:9.) So it's clear to everyone that it's only the living Christ in us who keeps us safe. Christian, don't be afraid to suffer. Jesus said the world will hate us if we follow Him. Consider it a privilege to take your place with the Lord Jesus Christ today.

You may actually be your strongest at the moment you feel the weakest. Paul didn't consider death to be the end. He looked beyond it. We're joined to a living Christ, and that which raised Him up will raise us up.

In this life we have a lot of trouble, and it seems to last a long time. It's so hard at times. But when we begin to measure it by the weight of glory that is coming someday, it feels like a *light* affliction compared to that *weight* of glory. Don't look around at the things which are seen—it's all passing away. The things which are not seen are eternal.

**NEXT: Will God's comfort be enough when
I face my last breath?**

7. Imagine you were a companion of the Apostle Paul. How do you think you would respond to all of the negativity (danger, persecution, imprisonment, weakness, sickness) that he and his companions endured?



When we know for sure
God is with us
in all life's troubles,
we can live by faith
and not by fear.



THRU the BIBLE

LESSON 4

ABSENT FROM THE BODY; PRESENT WITH THE LORD



Begin with prayer



Read **2 Corinthians 5**



Listen at TTB.org/2Corinthians to **2 Corinthians 5:1-10**, **2 Corinthians 5:10-15**, and **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

Will God's comfort be enough when I face my last breath?

When our "earthly house" collapses, God tells us we will have a new house, "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (5:1). We can know this for sure because the Spirit of God makes it real to us. You can be equally sure God's comfort will carry us through the process.

You know well that you are more than a body. You've got an outward person and an inward person that is spiritual. The outward perishes, but the inward is renewed day by day. When we die, our body is put in the grave, but every believer steps out of their body and out of time and enters eternity with Christ.

God is a person, but He's not a physical, material being. He is a Spirit. (See John 4:24.) Someday, this body of ours will be planted in the ground, but it will be raised a spiritual body. When it's our time, won't it be wonderful to leave these weak and frail bodies and slip into our new bodies? Death will be swallowed up by everlasting life once and for all.

Since the first time we hear of it, we can't wait to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. This is our inheritance if He is our Savior and our only hope.

Jesus Christ gave us His Spirit like a down payment, implying He's got more for us down the road. Jesus Christ purchased us, and the Holy Spirit now indwells us. One of these days we'll move out of this old house and meet the Lord in the air. What will that be like for us to stand there in front of Him clothed in just His righteousness? It will be glorious.

But as long as we are at home in this body, we're absent from the Lord. But we can be sure when we leave this body we will be present with the Lord. How do we know? We walk by faith. We take God at His word. When we leave this body, we'll be "present with the Lord" (5:8). Our soul doesn't die. If we are to go to be with Christ, our body must be changed. Those who are alive when Jesus calls us to the clouds won't go through death, but their bodies will still need to be changed. (See 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.)

This is all good news; we need never despair, having confidence in what God tells us is ahead for us. Today we walk by faith; today our fellowship with the Lord is just a taste of what we will someday experience.

This taste of heaven is motivating us to pursue good things, ambitious things that will please the Lord. Come life or death ("whether present or absent"), we will someday stand face to face with Jesus, and pleasing Him is what it means to be truly Christian.

We are already accepted *in* the Beloved (see Ephesians 1:5-6). Your standing before God is complete; He looks at you and sees Jesus. You have all the righteousness and sanctification and redemption you need (see 1 Corinthians 1:30). If you are a believer in Christ, you are accepted *in* the Beloved. Accepted in Christ is the *standing* that all believers have before God.

To be accepted *of* Him is a different thing. This has to do with how we live our lives. Do we live for Christ? Are we ambitious to be accepted of Him? This means we want to love and please the one who loves us.

Do you really want to be God's servant? If you do, then you can accomplish something for which He will be able to reward you. We will each stand before Him someday at His judgment seat and give an account of our service. This should motivate us to serve Him with all our hearts.

This judgment seat, called the bema, is a place only for believers. This seat is not to judge your sins, since Jesus fully paid for those on the Cross. (The Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15 is where the unsaved will stand in judgment of their sins. If you are a believer, your name is written in the Book of Life, and you already have eternal life.) This judgment is to reward what things we did in our bodies down here, how we lived the Christian life.

We are going to answer to the Lord for our lives. This should create the fear of the Lord in us and motivate us to serve Him acceptably so when we stand before Him on that day, He will be able to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23).

God’s judgment that day also reminds us that our God is a holy and righteous God—who loves you, who wants to save you. But if you don’t come to God *His* way, you will come before Him in judgment. This is a fearful thing. All the more, God’s judgment should motivate us to teach the whole Word of God in a loving way. We need to teach people very clearly that they are lost without Christ. They don’t need behavioral modification or a psychological adjustment. Without Christ, we are all doomed sinners on the way to hell. All in the human family are sinners before God. The only solution for all is the gospel of Jesus Christ. What we need is Jesus!

And we have Jesus. His love pushes us out, motivating us, to give out the Word of God.

And the good news is if we are in Christ, we are a new creation (5:17). We leave the old things behind, like our sin and this world system. Now we are identified with the glorified Christ. We have been baptized into the body of believers and we belong to Him.

How do you know you are a new creation in Christ? Because Jesus says so on the basis of the Word of God. (See John 5:24.) You no longer belong to the old creation that fell in Adam. The new creation stands in Christ Jesus, and you are *in Him*. We still stand in the place of danger and temptation, and we may fail in many, many ways, but the wonderful truth is that the Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us and we are a new creation in Him.

As a new creation, we are reconciled to God. Reconciliation goes one step further than salvation. It’s more than having our sins forgiven and divine justice being satisfied. Reconciliation means we have a completely changed relationship with God. As a holy God, He couldn’t just reach down and save us. God had to do something about our sin. He’s the one that did the work

of reconciling (5:19) through the sacrifice Jesus Christ made on our behalf (see also Colossians 1:20-22 and Philippians 2:10). God doesn't change. But we stand in a different place because Christ died for us.

Adam died spiritually that day he sinned in the Garden, before he ever died physically. He became alienated and separated from God, and he had no capacity for God. That is the condition of the world, and God had to judge that (see Ezekiel 18:20 and Genesis 2:17).

But now that Christ has died, the sinner's position has changed. Today God has His arms outstretched to a lost world. *"You can come to Me."* The worst sinner in the world can come to Him. It doesn't make any difference who you are, you can come to Him. Because Christ died, a holy God no longer deals with us in judgment, but now He reaches down to save all those who will come to Him. Jesus Christ bore all that judgment on Himself, to pay man's debt so that we can be reconciled to God. You don't have to do anything to win God over. He is not angry with you. He doesn't hate you. God *loves* you.

Now those who have been reconciled to God become His ambassadors. Our citizenship is now in heaven, but we represent God down here. God is still friendly with this world. He has sent us as His representatives to tell the world, "God will save you! All you need to do is come to Him." We have the privilege of saying, "Be reconciled to God." All He asks you to do is to turn to Him. How can He do this? It is because Christ bore our sin for us and we can walk away free.

You don't need to do one thing to win God over. You don't have to shed tears to soften His heart. He loves you. He wants to save you. Why? Because Jesus Christ took your place on the cross. He took your hell so you might have His heaven. He did that for you.

**NEXT: Don't be a Christian unless you mean it.
What does it look like to be satisfied in God?**

7. What does reconciliation tell us about the way God loves us?

LESSON 5

HOW TO LIVE FOR GOD



Begin with prayer



Read **2 Corinthians 6**



Listen at [TTB.org/2Corinthians](https://www.TTB.org/2Corinthians) to **2 Corinthians 6:1-11** and
2 Corinthians 6:11–7:1

Do you want to encourage your pastor? Pray for him.

Those in ministry need God's comfort, too. In fact, the standards we try to meet make us ask with Paul, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2:16).

The work of the gospel is all our work; the line between full-time ministers and lay servants needs to be rubbed out. We are all workers together since God gives a gift to each member of the body of Christ to serve the body. Certainly some have been given distinct gifts that touch the body as a whole, like the gifts of teaching, of pastoring, of service—all useful for the work of the ministry, which is equipping believers to serve.

Many think it is the pastor or the evangelist's job to win people for Christ, but it is all our business. God has given teachers, preachers, and evangelists to equip the body of believers for their ministry for Christ. The shepherd doesn't produce the sheep. He feeds the sheep and he watches over the sheep, but he doesn't produce sheep. He can't. The sheep produce sheep.

How are you responding to the grace God has given you? He has showered His goodness and mercy on you and given you gifts to serve. If you've received His goodness and rejoice in His salvation yet live an ungodly, worldly lifestyle, then God's grace has been given to you in vain.

How are you responding to the love of God?

Are you living a life no one would point to and say, "Because of their life, I have no confidence in the salvation he professes"? Our work as God's servants gets validated—or not—in the details. People are watching us—especially in hard times. They gauge the truth of the gospel by what they see in us. Do we tell the truth? Do we have a clear head and sincere heart? Do we respond to each other with gentleness and holiness and honest love? We need genuine love, which the Spirit puts into our hearts. These are the things that should characterize our everyday ministry.

Even more so should the preacher live "by the word of truth" (he should know his Bible). He should preach "by the power of God," which is possible only as he spends time alone with God before he steps into the pulpit. "By the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left" means he's right living in all areas. Paul summarizes what this looks like by describing situations he had endured and the positive character God produced in him through it (6:7).

- Purity—when we're praised and approved of, and when we're blamed (beware: flattery harms us more than criticism).
- Patience when we're slandered and do not retaliate.
- Spiritual understanding when we give out God's Word, even though we might not be trusted.
- Kindness when we are ignored by the world but known by God.
- Perseverance when we are beaten within an inch of our lives, but refuse to die (Paul often experienced persecution, beatings, whippings, stonings, and yet he lived on).
- Filled with sorrow (when people rejected the gospel), yet always filled with deep joy in Christ.
- The power of God when we have nothing yet have it all (see 1 Corinthians 3:22-23; *We might be poor, but oh how rich we are!* Paul said).

Paul loved the people in Corinth. It didn't matter if they were little baby Christians or carnal Christians, his heart went out to them; in fact, it almost breaks for them. He wants them to know about this rich life in God. But in his effort to stir their hearts for God, he apparently also stirs up animosity in the hearts of those who hated God and His Word. They tried to cause trouble for those who follow the Lord. It's still true today: If you stand for God, it may cost you dearly.

How we relate to those who don't know or love the Lord follows. Paul asks the saints at Corinth not to be yoked to unbelievers—don't be joined together like animals pulling together to work the field. *Don't form a real union with an unbeliever*, Paul said, like in a business enterprise, a partnership, a marriage, or a long-term enterprise. Make a clean break from the sins of the flesh. Live separate from the world.

Paul didn't say that believers should break off all their relationships with unbelievers (see 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, 10:27). He just wanted them to be free of a binding relationship *that resulted in their spiritual defilement*—anything that would prevent the Christian from living a consistently obedient Christian life.

After all, our goals changed when we became a Christian. Now our primary purpose in life is to follow God's will and please Him. An unbeliever's goals are incompatible with a Christian's goal. Paul asks five questions that show the diversity:

- How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong?
- What communion has light with darkness?
- Does Christ go for a walk with the devil?
- What part does a believer play with an unbeliever?
- Who would think of setting up pagan idols in God's holy temple?

Today the temple of God is the human body of every believer. The Holy Spirit lives in us. The one in whom God dwells can't be linked with idols. We already have a binding relationship with Him, and we can't be unfaithful to Him by going after another. We belong to Christ.

Many Christians already consider themselves separate from the world. They wouldn't think of doing this or of doing that. Yet they gossip and have the meanest tongues, never realizing that very thing is worldly and unclean. Worldliness creeps into even the best churches and lives.

If you go after indulgences that feed your bodies and souls, that is worldliness, too. We need to be very careful. It's easy to talk about the things of God, to claim the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, to say we love Him, to consider ourselves separated unto Him, and still not in reality be separate from the world and separated to Him.

Don't be a Christian unless you mean it. Don't say Jesus satisfies you if you're looking around for something else to fulfill you. If you live a life for God, finding Him to be your greatest joy and satisfaction, you will be the kind of son or daughter who brings honor to the Father. Because He is not only our God who is holy, but He is our Father.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, He will always be your Father. He wants to act like a Father to you. He would like to treat you as a son or daughter. But if you play around with worldliness, if you don't mean what you say, then you can be sure God the Father will discipline you like His child. He asks you to come out from the world, to live authentic lives, clean and separate from those who don't love Him. Then God can have an intimate relationship with you as a Father with a child.

NEXT: What's the best way to show how the grace of God is working in your heart?

7. Second Corinthians presents God as the perfect heavenly Father.
What would a perfect earthly father look like, and how does that show us who God is?

LESSON 6

CHRISTIAN LIVING AND CHRISTIAN GIVING



Begin with prayer



Read **2 Corinthians 7:1–10:4**



Listen at [TTB.org/2Corinthians](https://www.TTB.org/2Corinthians) to **2 Corinthians 7**, **2 Corinthians 8:1-7**,
2 Corinthians 8:8–9:5, and **2 Corinthians 9:6–10:4**

Life has a way of knocking you off course. You think you're fine going about your own business, and then something out of nowhere hits you from behind. Where do you go then? This letter to the Corinthians tells us we can get through this with God's help. And then after He helps us, we can help each other.

The apostle Paul understood all about that and was writing to comfort and challenge the Corinthians. If you remember his first letter, Paul called them out to do a really hard thing. Now, in this letter, he comforts them in responding to God with faith and obedience. They had acted like real children of God and it gave God the freedom to act like a real Father to them.

If we don't deal with sin the way God asks us to, we don't lose our salvation, but we do lose our fellowship with God the way He wants to relate to us. If we don't lead a clean life, God can't treat us as a Father would want to treat His child. Sadly, too often we don't know by experience what a wonderful Father we have.

What can we do to change that?

Paul tells us, “Having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves” (7:1). How can we cleanse ourselves? No matter how hard we try, we can’t clean our own guilty conscience. We can’t wash guilt out of our minds. But we don’t have to; God has already done that through the death of Christ. That was once and for all. But even after we have been cleansed from our sins by the blood of Christ, our hearts still need a daily cleansing from all the ways we get dirty living here on earth.

That’s what happens when, by faith, you hear and receive God’s Word every day and then do what it says: The Word cleans you up. The Holy Spirit is able to deal with the sin in your life. When Jesus prayed for us, He asked that God would set us apart in truth, because God’s Word is truth (see John 17:17). The best bar of soap in the world is the Word of God.

The world gives an ungodly respectability to sins related to our body. You can’t look very far in any medium today to be bombarded with all kinds of unholy appetites being promoted. Don’t yield to them; they’re filthy to God. If you indulge in them, God can’t act toward you as your Father. Although you may actually be His son, He cannot treat you as a Father would like to treat His son.

God wants to clean up the sins of the spirit, too. They are the secret sins—like vanity and pride. Like wanting what others have. Like not believing God and talking about others behind their backs. It’s relatively easy to live by the “don’ts” (don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t sleep around), but God calls us to a pure life in our spirits, too.

The problem is, we have a holiness gap. We belong to Jesus—He is our righteousness (see Hebrews 12:13-14)—but our lives and His perfection are really far apart. God wants us to be holy in the public and the private places of our lives.

Paul was writing to applaud the Corinthians in living out their holiness in responding to God’s prompt. Paul joined them in trying to live a holy life. Even then, teachers who claimed to be minister of the gospel failed in their private lives. Paul said he had wronged no one; he had not been teaching anything on his own that would hurt others. He also was being a good example in money matters. He was straight in all his dealings, which is what God expects of any of His servants.

I'm entitled to be heard because I am living what I preach, Paul said. Paul loved these Christians. They were constantly on his heart. He told others how proud he was of them. Now, concerned about them, Paul wrote to help them over anything that would hinder their growth. Previously he called them babes and carnal. *Put away the sin you're playing around with—deal with it*, he said. When they listened and did what Paul directed, he told them next to forgive those who repented and comfort them so they wouldn't be swallowed up in sorrow. Take them back into fellowship. *He's your brother, so treat him like family*.

In between 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul personally struggled with concern that he had been too harsh with the Corinthian church. Paul opens up his very human side, modeling for us a tender and loving care for the church. He loved these people—so much that he said what needed to be said, even when it was painful for both of them. But gladly, the Corinthians received the hard word and repented. Paul felt relieved and so grateful when Titus told him about their godly response.

Repentance happens when you change your mind. The only repentance God asks of a lost person is to *believe!* When you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you change your mind; you turn from something to Someone. Paul used the Thessalonians as an example of what repentance looks like. They turned from idols to Christ (see 1 Thessalonians 1:9). They changed their minds about who was getting first place, turning from their old way of thinking to Jesus.

When a Christian is walking in sin, God says, *"Turn around!"* This is a tough spot to be in, so be aware of what could happen. It's shameful and embarrassing to be called out on sin. Often people (even Christians) will shed tears, but they might not truly be changing their mind about their sin. That's worldly sorrow, and it leads nowhere good. They're crying because they got caught, not because they admit what they were doing was wrong. True repentance is when you regret your sin, see it as a wedge between you and God, and change your perspective to it—you turn your back on it and walk towards Christ. That's what the Corinthian church did. They really repented.

When the Corinthians were restored to fellowship, they felt really comforted. Paul, too, felt restored. This is because the Helper, who lives in us, comes alongside us and whispers comfort and strength into our spirits. He helps us live a life that pleases God.

FROM CHRISTIAN LIVING TO CHRISTIAN GIVING

Whenever you think about giving to God out of your own resources, think of the word “grace.” The word “gift” in some translations of 2 Corinthians 8-9 is actually “grace,” mentioned 10 times. Giving is a grace of God. If you want to know how to give to God, study this section. It’s the most extended and complete section on Christian giving in the Bible. It doesn’t give us rules, but clear-cut principles for giving. *But I thought we were supposed to give a tithe?* This is a principle you might like to follow, but it is not a rule for anyone today.

You may have heard grace defined as God’s unmerited favor. The Greeks used *charis* to mean an outward grace, like beauty, goodness, kindness, gratitude, delight, or pleasure. When the Holy Spirit chose this word, He gave it new depth and a new glory. Paul uses it again and again.

The grace of God is the passion of God to share all His goodness with others. God wants to give you good things, goodnesses. He wants to make you fine and noble, and He wants to bring you into the likeness of His Son (see Ephesians 2:8-9). We were lost sinners; we had nothing to offer God for our salvation, so He saved us by grace. He has a passion for wanting to save us. He loves us, but He could not arbitrarily forgive us because He is a holy God. He had to provide a way—so He sent His Son to die for us (see John 3:16). God is in the business of giving, not receiving.

Some think God is poor and needs our gifts. He doesn’t (see Psalm 50:10-12). God doesn’t get hungry. God doesn’t need anything from us.

The early church considered giving to be a grace. It was a passion, an overwhelming desire to share the things of God with others.

Now Paul writes to the Corinthians about a specific, local situation—helping the saints in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church had been the first to give out the gospel—the gospel began there. The apostles loved Jerusalem, and they locked their arms around their beloved city until persecution drove them from it, scattered them abroad, sent them down the highway into Judea and Samaria, and finally to the uttermost parts of the earth. But now the church in Jerusalem was weakened by persecution. Israel was also suffering in a famine. The church needed help.

Paul was now on his third missionary journey, and as he visited the mission churches, he collected an offering for the church in Jerusalem. This is quite revolutionary—the church plants sending an offering to help the mother church. As Paul prepared to come to Corinth, he asks them to take up a collection before he arrived so when he got there, they could focus on the Word of God.

These principles about giving Paul lays down are still as sharp and fresh today as they were when Paul first gave them.

PRINCIPLE #1: *Christians are to be an example in giving.* Paul told them about the generosity of the Macedonians—giving out of their joy, even when they had little to spare. Paul hopes the Corinthians will show that kind of grace in giving, too. Their gift was a grace, a fellowship, as they shared in the things of Christ. Paul praised them for being sold out to God. They gave themselves to the Lord in helping to get out the gospel. Now he asked them to give with that same passion. God loves a cheerful giver, and we see it in shoe leather here—it was a fellowship. They gladly shared what they had.

PRINCIPLE #2: *Support the work that blesses you spiritually.* Every church plant owed the home church in Jerusalem for all their spiritual blessings. They had received the gospel from them. Now they gladly returned material gifts to the home church when it needed their help. That is the way gifts should be given—out of the abundance of joy. We shouldn't give reluctantly or because we think we ought to give. We give passionately so that the Word of God can be lived out in others.

If God doesn't have you, He doesn't want anything from you. If God doesn't have the hand, He doesn't want the gift in the hand. The real test of any person's faith lies in what he gives. Giving is a part of our worship to God. If you do not have the grace of giving, ask the Lord to give you a generous, sharing spirit.

The Corinthians were growing in their faith. They were able to witness, they were growing in their knowledge of God's Word, they persevered, they loved each other, now Paul asks them to grow in this grace of giving.

Let the Macedonian's example stir up generosity in you, he said. Let your generosity bring out the best in you today, too. Giving is really the test of a person's love—and it's the most sensitive area of Christian stewardship.

Paul told the Corinthians that their hearts have always been in the right place, and so now they should continue to give and follow through with the commitments they made. Their commitment was to the Lord, but it will bring relief to the Jerusalem saints. *Give willingly out of what you have*, Paul said. *Give for the glory of God.*

Of course, Christian ministries should give account as to how the money is used to further God's work. Utmost honesty is needed in the way the organization handles money entrusted to this. This is a sensitive area in the Lord's work. We need to have confidence in the organizations to which we give, confident they are operating at the highest level of integrity. If you doubt this, don't support that organization.

PRINCIPLE #3: *Give cheerfully.* Give willingly, then. Now, Paul encourages the Corinthians to give generously. When he was talking on this same subject to the Ephesians, Paul reminded them that the Lord often said, "it's more blessed to give than to receive" (see Acts 20:35). "Blessed" means "happy." It will make you happier to give than to receive. How does it affect you when you give?

The critical test for us today is to ask, *Do I sow/give sparingly?* A farmer doesn't mind scattering bushel after bushel of seed, because he believes it will get an abundant harvest. God multiplies the farmer's seed. God multiplies everything you do for Him. So don't be afraid to give to the Lord's work. Use balanced, good common sense in your giving, but give to the glory of God.

God doesn't want any grudging giving. He doesn't want one penny from you if you would rather keep it for yourself. If you are going to give grudgingly, you ought not give at all. Not only does God not want it, but He'll likely not use it either. He only wants you to give willingly and gladly. He loves a cheerful giver. That should be the happiest part of the service. If you can't give cheerfully, God doesn't want you to give.

Sow sparingly, reap sparingly. Sow bountifully, reap bountifully. God doesn't put us under law ("you must give 10%"), because He wants your gift to be a grace, a passion, a desire to share. God asks us to give as a grace according to our circumstances. Some Christians should be giving much more than a tithe. Other Christians are not able to give at all. We are to give as we "are able." It's the most wonderful privilege in the world to invest in what God is doing. He's telling us here how we can be happy by giving.

A generous gift is the evidence of the grace of God working in your heart. When you give, it causes people to thank God for you. It is God who gets the praise and the glory.

Now Paul caps the whole subject of giving by reminding us of God's great gift to us—so great, it's even beyond words. Regardless of how much you give, you cannot give like God gives.

None of us can approach the gift God gave in giving His own Son to die. Think of this for a moment. Though He was rich, He became poor for us. He left heaven and all its glory to come down as a missionary to this world. He came not only to live but to give His life in death for you. He made His soul a sacrifice for sin for you and for me.

**NEXT: God gives us spiritual weapons
to fight a spiritual enemy.**

7. How could your giving prompt and encourage other people to do the same thing?

LET YOUR *generosity*
BRING OUT THE BEST IN YOU.
giving IS THE TEST OF
A PERSON'S LOVE.



THRU the BIBLE

LESSON 7

IN MY DEFENSE



Begin with prayer



Read **2 Corinthians 10–11**



Listen at [TTB.org/2Corinthians](https://www.ttb.org/2Corinthians) to **2 Corinthians 10:1–11:5** and **2 Corinthians 11**

In this second letter to the Corinthians, the first part is about Christian *living*, the second part is about Christian *giving*. Now we dive into the third part on Christian *guarding—protecting what is precious to the Lord*. This new section has such a different tone and style that some thought it was another letter. Really, Paul is just addressing a different audience—a smaller one—in the Corinthian church.

You remember that a majority of the saints there had come to trust and respect Paul's authority as an apostle, but there was still a small holdout of people who wanted to discredit Paul's role in their lives.

As Paul defends his apostleship, he opens up his missionary heart and we get to know him like never before. When Paul first wrote the church, it was to correct an issue of sinful behavior. The minority criticized him saying, "Paul writes so big and tough, but when he's with us, he's nobody. Who does he think he is?" This is the enemy at work. Satan tries to discredit the man.

But Paul pleads with them by "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (10:1). He came to Corinth as a tentmaker; he worked in the marketplace all day (to support himself so no church had to). He sweated and worked hard, talking to the crowds as they passed. The cranky Corinthians said of him, "He's not an apostle. Look at him—he's an ordinary tentmaker."

Yes, Paul was an ordinary man, but he was also an apostle. Paul looked just like anyone else. In fact, some people looked down on him because he worked with his hands and was not especially easy on the eyes. But Paul said, like Jesus who came to earth as a man, he was just an ordinary guy. Our Lord didn't defend Himself. He wasn't anything to look at, either. He was meek and lowly, and that is to be the badge of His followers.

He had the authority of an apostle and was on a divine mission. He knew he had God's power for a purpose, but he didn't want the Corinthians to force him to exercise his authority. *Let me prove it by my life and how I preach the Word of God.*

We walk in the flesh (in our weakness), Paul said. *But we don't war against our weaknesses, but engage in spiritual warfare* (see Ephesians 6:12). He didn't try to impress the Corinthians with polished speeches and the latest philosophy, but deliberately kept it plain and simple. He preached Jesus Christ first, who He is. Then he preached what Jesus did—He was crucified, dead, buried, and rose again. Paul had a grand perspective of an entire battlefield. There was a heaven to gain, and there was a hell to shun. He was engaged in warfare that was spiritual.

Spiritual warfare means we have a spiritual enemy, and a spiritual enemy requires spiritual weapons. And God has given us a mighty and effective defense.

Our first weapon is the *Word of God*. Paul came to Corinth, that citadel of philosophy and religion, wielding the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (see Ephesians 6:17).

We, too, need to have confidence in the Word of God. More than just a creed, we need to stake our lives on the conviction of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures; it's what God said, from beginning to end.

Our other weapons are the presence of the *Holy Spirit* and *prayer*. Paul recognized his own human weakness, but he knew he was sealed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and he called on God's Spirit to fight the unseen battle. He submitted to the Spirit in every thought.

In this spiritual battle, the warriors are successful and God gets the victory. All the glory goes to Him as the fragrance of His knowledge goes out into every place (see 2:14). Not everyone will come to Christ, but we can make sure everyone has the opportunity to hear the Word of God and respond to it for themselves.

Talking to those who opposed his authority, Paul tells them his ministry with them is for their good. He wants to build them up in the faith. He never intended for his letters to offend them, to be bold, or frightening—nor was it under his own physical strength or by his eloquence that he wanted to lead them. Obviously, Paul said, it wasn't by his own strength, but his authority came from God's Spirit.

Paul reminded them that he was the first one to bring the gospel to them, and he had traveled a long way to do that. He didn't want to be their pastor or build on another man's foundation; he was called to begin a work and then to travel on. The Lord had frontiers yet for him to explore. He's not a pastor but a missionary—that's what God called him to do. Paul came to Corinth. He preached the gospel. A church came into existence because he introduced them to Jesus Christ; the church in Corinth is now joined to the living Christ.

Paul then lets down his guard and expresses deep concern for them. He wants them to have a deeply personal relationship with Jesus, but their spiritual enemy, in his subtlety, is corrupting their minds from simply trusting Christ (see 11:3).

Paul writes, "I am jealous for you with godly jealousy" (11:2). Why was Paul willing to make himself a fool, as it were, for them? Because he loves them. He would much rather teach them about Christ than to spend time defending himself, but now it was necessary. Defending himself doesn't serve the purpose of his ministry, yet he feels he must do it so Satan doesn't beguile them with his subtlety just like he did Eve.

Of course, this is Satan working all this. At the very beginning of the early church the devil persecuted Christians, but he found that he wasn't stopping the spread of Christianity. In those first 100 years after Christ lived on earth, the church spread like wildfire, sweeping across the Roman Empire. By A.D. 315 it had gone into every nook and corner of the empire—even when thousands died for their faith in Jesus Christ.

When our enemy, the devil, saw that persecution would not stop the church, he changed his strategy. He *joined* the church. He found it more effective to hurt the church from the inside. He still does that today. He attacks the validity of the Word of God and tries to discredit the gospel. If that doesn't work, he tries to discredit the man who preaches the gospel. So he tried to discredit Paul.

But just because Paul came to them as a tentmaker and because he walked in the meekness and gentleness of Christ doesn't discredit him as an apostle or that he was taking advantage of them. In fact, he wouldn't allow the Corinthians to contribute to his support at all. He raised his own funds making tents. Just because his hands were calloused didn't mean he wasn't an outstanding apostle. Others from previous churches also supported him to allow him more time to preach the gospel.

Other men, such as Apollos, may have been more eloquent and polished than me, Paul admitted, and they didn't work for a living. But Paul wasn't worried about comparisons. Not once did he ever ask the Corinthians to help him out, and he never took a dime from them. Unlike other false teachers who posed as God's servants but were just masquerading as light, Paul brought them only good. As Satan is transformed into an angel of light, so his ministers are transformed as the ministers of righteousness. They are very attractive, but they would put believers back under the bondage of the Law, then live off their generosity, exalt themselves, smite the church, and the people would put up with it! *Wake up, Paul pleaded.*

Paul then got personal. *Let me tell you about my life as a minister of the gospel ... and it was bloody.*

First, though, there was no question about his high breeding and his religious heritage. But as soon as Paul surrendered himself to Christ Jesus, his life became a target of suffering.

Paul said he worked much harder than other teachers, he's been jailed more, beaten up more, even to the point of death. *I've been flogged five times with the Jews' 39 lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I've been shipwrecked three times, and drifted in the open sea for a night and a day. In hard traveling year in and year out, I've had to ford rivers, defend myself from robbers, struggled with friends, struggled with enemies. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, in danger from desert sun and sea storm, and betrayed by those I thought were my brothers. I've known hard work, spent many a lonely night without sleep, been hungry, nearly frozen to death, and even more recently escaped from those who wanted to kill me by being lowered over a wall in a basket. And that's not even the half of it when you throw in the normal pressures and worries of leading the churches (see 11:25-33).*

How many of us today could say we've been through anything like this? We know practically nothing of hardship for the sake of Jesus Christ. Read over Paul's list again and bow your head in humility and say, "Oh, Lord Jesus, help me to be true to You. Help me to be faithful to You."

**NEXT: Where do we get the strength we need
to live the Christian life?**

7. If you had been through everything Paul had to endure for the gospel, how do you think you would respond?

LESSON 8

ENOUGH GRACE



Begin with prayer



Read **2 Corinthians 12–13**



Listen at [TTB.org/2Corinthians](https://www.TTB.org/2Corinthians) to **2 Corinthians 12:1-16** and **2 Corinthians 12:14–13:14**

We've walked with Paul down many roads so far in our studies, and no one would deny how much he suffered for the name of Jesus Christ. He's already told about his life-threatening situations, perhaps so none would ever say they endured more than Paul the apostle. Yet Paul said he would boast only of the things that showed his weakness.

But now Paul tells us about some glorious experiences. The Lord has given Paul visions and revelations like no one else has known. If you know Paul's testimony, you know the Lord appeared to him on the Damascus road (see Acts 9). We also know the Lord taught Paul for three years in the Arabian desert. Paul says very little about those personal appearances. Now here is another such incident.

Around the time of Paul's first missionary journey, 14 years before he wrote this letter, Paul speaks of being taken up into the third heaven. Acts 14 describes how certain Jews hated Paul and his preaching and stirred up a crowd who stoned Paul and left him for dead. But as the disciples gathered around him, Paul came to, got up, and went back into town. Did Paul die and was caught up into heaven? Or was he knocked unconscious and had a

vision? Paul is not dogmatic about it, and we can't be either. But either way, Paul saw the third heaven. There he heard the unspeakable spoken, but was forbidden to tell what he heard.

Most people would have written books on such an experience or preached a whole series of messages about it. But this is all Paul says. There is no self-glory here. The man who was taken up into the third heaven and heard unspeakable words is the same humble man who was let over the wall in a basket (see Acts 9). He says so much and yet he says so little.

Another insight into Paul's personal life was his candid admission of a "thorn in the flesh" (12:7), something God allowed him to suffer. A *gift*, Paul calls it, *to remind me of my limitations*. What was this thorn in the flesh? We don't know. It could be very poor vision. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul mentions he had to write in large letters, which would indicate he didn't see well. Whatever the thorn was, Paul asked the Lord three times to remove it. It's not that the Lord didn't hear his prayers; it was that the answer of the Lord was *no*.

This happens to us sometimes. We keep asking for something to which God has already answered no. If He doesn't give us what we ask for, we think He has not answered our prayer. Eventually we discover His "no" was the best possible answer He could have given us. This is the life of faith. In his limitation, Paul discovered God's grace was enough, all he needed. Grace is God's provision for our every need when we need it.

"My grace is sufficient for you." God said He would not remove the thorn, but He would give Paul the grace to bear the thorn. That is the wonderful thing about it all. Paul was so physically weak in his ministry that the Spirit of God empowered him. "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (12:9). He's saying in effect, *I'm going to take these things in stride—these limitations and the abuse and opposition and bad breaks—and let the Lord have control of my ministry. I'm stronger when I'm weaker*. God can use the weak man when he turns it over to Him. The Lord enabled Paul to do things he could not have done had he been naturally strong (see Romans 8:35-37). Someone has said God chose not to cure Paul, but He healed him. Paul would glory in his weaknesses and not in the fact that he had had a vision.

Paul was their spiritual father. He had led them to Christ and had founded the church of Corinth. The Spirit of God insisted that Paul not tell them about what he had seen in heaven but instead to tell them about his sufferings and disappointments down here.

Paul wanted to help them grow in Christ. He wasn't interested in any gain he would get from them. He says, *I wasn't after what you have, I was after you; I wanted to win you for Christ.*

Paul didn't use clever methods; he preached the Word of God in simplicity. He didn't send other men along after him to make a gain out of the Corinthians. Instead, he did everything to build them up stronger in their personal relationship with Christ.

When Paul next visited, he said he hoped to find out that they had grown up. Instead, there would be a lot of debates and arguments. Like our churches today, the church in Corinth was filled with wraths, conflicts, and harsh whispers and words.

You have to remember where they lived. Corinth was a vile city, known as the worst sin center in the Roman Empire. People *went there* to sin. Although it's true that where sin abounds, there grace did much more abound, but it caused the people of Corinth to look lightly on sinful things.

As we've studied these two letters to the Corinthians, perhaps you've thought, *The local church in Corinth certainly was not a very good church.* That is true; not only of Corinth, but of our churches today. The church is a group of people who ought to be holy for God's sake, ought to be living for Him. But too often this isn't true. In fact, too often it's too busy with its internal problems to be interested in the Word of God. Yet this doesn't negate the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ loves the church. He gave Himself for it that He might wash it, that He might cleanse it, and that He might make each believer acceptable to God. Although we are far from what we should be, we should be moving in that direction.

Paul tells them he's coming to Corinth to visit them and to authenticate his office as apostle. (Remember he's defending himself from the group that is rebelling against his authority.) In the first century, certain sign gifts were given to the apostles to validate their message. The early church could identify Paul as an apostle because he had the gifts of an apostle.

Apostles had the gift of healing. They could raise the dead. They could speak languages and dialects that were foreign to them. Paul had gone through the Galatian country, and there must have been 50 languages in that area, yet Paul could speak them all. He hadn't studied them. In that early day it was necessary to get the Word of God out into the Roman

Empire in a hurry, so these apostles were equipped with these gifts. Today missionaries and Bible translators must spend years learning the languages they will use.

Everything is to be brought right out in the open and authenticated when he gets there. Paul will show proof of his apostleship by the power of Christ working through his weakness. The Word of God was mighty and had transformed them in that sin-sick city. Paul and the Corinthians didn't understand power in the same way. For them it was on display in an aggressive and a mighty personality. For the apostle, it is seen in weakness. Even Jesus Himself was "crucified in weakness" (13:4). It sounds strange to hear about the weakness of God, but Jesus went to the cross in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God.

The Corinthian church had been examining him, but Paul now turns the tables and challenges them to examine themselves. He believes that Jesus Christ was working in each of them, but asks them to test themselves, to take inventory. At first it sounds like he's asking them to test if they are believers, but that's not the case. Paul knew they were believers; he was asking them to test if they were "walking in the faith." *Look at your life, what you think and what you do. Are you growing in your faith? Are you living obediently to the Word of God?*

Paul has made an inventory of himself, and he wants them to know he is in the faith. Give yourself regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. Paul is out for their good, saying he just wants them to experience the kind of life God wants for them that only comes as they grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Paul's challenge to take a life inventory is not meant to tear them down, calling them baby Christians. Instead, he wants to build up their faith and help them "become complete—be whole and complete in Christ.

This challenge also was intended to "be of good comfort" (13:11). Remember at the beginning of this letter we learned about the comfort of God? Comfort means *help*. God is the One who is called to our side to help us, to strengthen us, to encourage us. God wants to do that for you today, too. No matter who you are, where you are, or how you are, God wants to help you. He can help you through His Word by means of the Holy Spirit alive in you, cultivating the fruit of His Spirit in love and peace.

These verses teach us great truths: God is with us to comfort us. We are to grow up and mature in Christ. We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. We can go forward for God with this kind of encouragement!

As we walk in God's Spirit, He will cultivate love and peace toward one another. This is the peace of God which goes beyond our understanding. This is the peace that Jesus made possible through the blood of His Cross. We are to live in that wholeness today and to be glad in God for our salvation.

When Paul says the blessing of the Trinity "be with you all," he includes us with the church in Corinth. We ought to enjoy all that we have in Christ Jesus: The *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ, the *love* of God, and the *communion* of the Holy Spirit. And we should be a witness of these things not only to the world but also to our own churches.

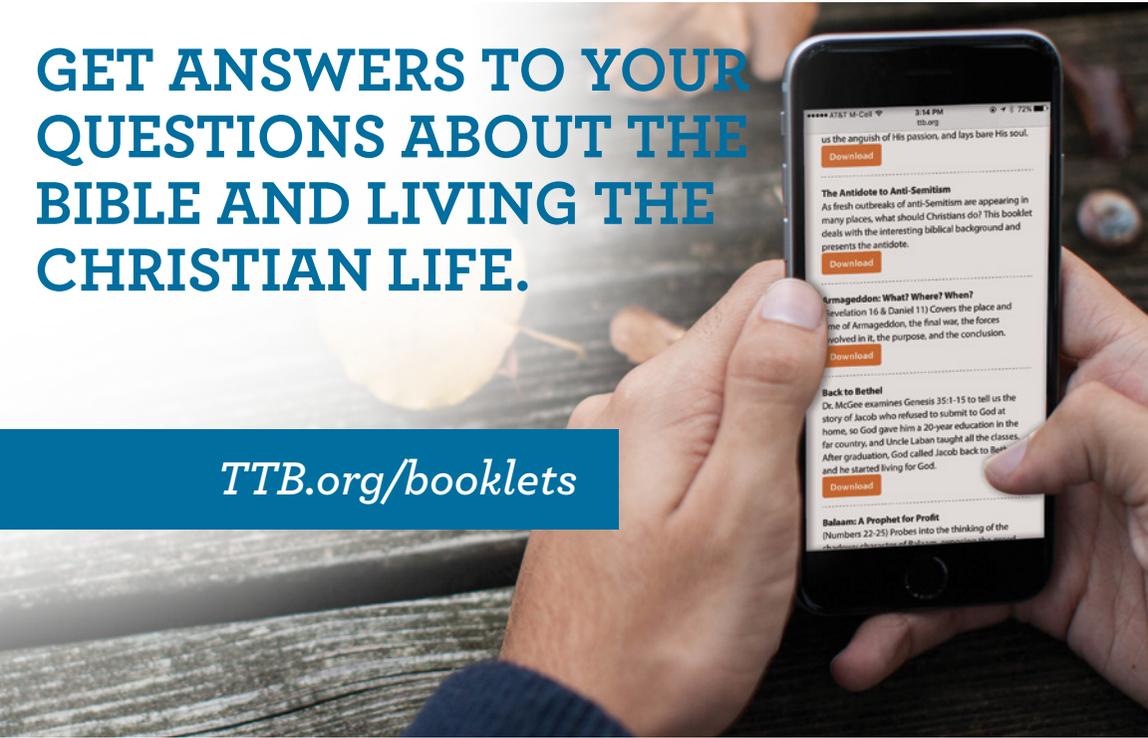
When we do that, the God of love and peace will be "with you." Don't miss that. You are not alone—God is *with* you today. How wonderful is that!

7. What evidence is there in your life that you are maturing in Christ?

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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