



**Sunday  
Morning  
Bible  
Class  
Corinthians 1 & 2**



*Lord of the Lakes*  
LUTHERAN CHURCH



# 1 Corinthians 1:1–17

## Paul greets the Corinthians and addresses their disunity

### Look

- Verse 3      Grace and peace are vitally important words in Christianity. Grace is the reason for salvation; peace is the result of salvation.
- Verse 9      Early in the letter, Paul calls attention to God’s faithfulness. It is the faithfulness of God that provides Christians with both comfort and incentive for godly living.
- Verse 16     The way in which Paul lists the people whom he baptized does not diminish the truth that God inspired this letter. When Paul mentioned Crispus and Gaius in verse 14, he was thinking of people in Corinth whom he had baptized. Stephanas did not come to mind at first because Paul did not baptize him in Corinth. A verse like this indicates that inspiration was not a mechanical process. Rather, God used people with their unique personalities and guided them to write down exactly what he wanted.

### Discuss

1. What two expressions in verse 2 describe the Corinthians (and all Christians) as saints?
2. In this letter Paul rebuked the Corinthian congregation for various reasons. Yet he was not “down” on the congregation. How does this become clear in verses 4–9?
3. What kind of divisions had developed in the congregation?

### Apply

4. There were many problems Paul needed to address with this letter, yet notice his opening words. What can Christians today learn from Paul?
5. What are some reasons why Christian congregations experience disunity and other problems?
6. The Corinthians had taken sides over their spiritual leaders. That was wrong. Yet what do 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13 and Hebrews 13:7 say about the attitude Christians are to have for their spiritual leaders?

*In spite of some thorny issues, which he quickly addressed, Paul greeted the Corinthians warmly with words of Christian love and concern.*

# 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5

## Jesus Christ—the wisdom and the power of God

### Look

- 1:18 Notice the recurring theme of this section: believer and unbeliever view the cross differently. Martin Luther spoke much of “the theology of the cross.” By that expression he meant that God chose to reveal himself not through demonstrations of glory and human wisdom but through the sacrifice of his Son on the cross.
- 1:22 Recall how many times the Jews demanded signs from Jesus. Recall also that Corinth was a center of great learning and wisdom.

### Discuss

1. Why can't human wisdom find Christ?
2. Is there really a “foolishness of God” or a “weakness of God”? (verse 25) Explain.
3. What was the membership of the Corinthian congregation like? (verse 26) How did this fit the pattern of God using the weak things of the world to silence people the world considers strong?
4. How is Christ the “power of God” and the “wisdom of God”?
5. What made Paul a good missionary and pastor?

### Apply

6. How has an emphasis on human wisdom adversely affected many Christian churches in our country?
7. How can Christians “boast in the Lord”?

*Paul showed that Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God and the power of God. For that reason he preached Christ alone.*

# 1 Corinthians 2:6–16

## The Holy Spirit—the source and giver of true wisdom

### Look

- Verse 10      The catechism speaks of the natural knowledge of God and the revealed knowledge of God. Here Paul points out that the Holy Spirit is behind the revealed knowledge of God.
- Verse 13      The Bible does not teach that the biblical authors were simply inspired in a general way. The Bible teaches verbal inspiration: the words the authors used in the original manuscripts were the very words God wanted them to use.

### Discuss

1. Paul had just downplayed wisdom. Yet now he says that he does use wisdom. What is the wisdom Paul teaches?
2. Which rulers do you suppose Paul had in mind in verse 8?
3. Through whom does God reveal his wisdom to us?
4. Why can God's thoughts only be revealed by God's Spirit?
5. Who is "the natural person"?

### Apply

6. How does the truth of verse 14 explain the unbelief and spiritual poverty in our world?
7. Explain what your congregation can do because it has the mind of Christ.

*The Holy Spirit provides the only real wisdom in this world when he reveals saving knowledge about Christ through the Bible.*

# 1 Corinthians 3

## God is glorified when acknowledged as the church's builder

### Look

Verse 4 Like many Christian congregations, the Corinthians had enjoyed the ministry of a number of called workers over the years.

Verse 16 Fellowship with God means that God makes his dwelling in Christians' hearts.

### Discuss

1. What did Paul mean when he said the Corinthians were "people of the flesh"?
2. What is the role that called workers have in the kingdom of God? What is God's role?
3. What is the foundation on which a Christian congregation is built?
4. Paul pictures a building crew erecting a church building. This represents God's called workers helping his church to grow. What two types of material does Paul list?
5. Destructible materials include dubious methods for building the church and leading people to join the church—methods that are based on man's wisdom and skill. Nondestructible materials are those that contribute to a church's spiritual welfare and result in Christians with true faith. What will happen to the work of each "building crew" and their "building" at the last judgment?

### Apply

6. What might lead pastors to use shoddy building materials in their ministry?
7. What can we do to become more united as a family of believers?

*While called workers are important in a Christian congregation, Christ is all-important, since he is the foundation.*

# 1 Corinthians 4

## Pastors—servants of Christ and managers of God’s good news

### Look

- Verse 2      The fundamental concept behind stewardship is taking care of someone else’s property. Christian stewardship is all about managing God’s property. Pastors are to be faithful managers of God’s Word.
- Verse 10     Sarcasm is a figure of speech that Bible writers like Paul used on occasion. Although people can misuse it to tear others down, the Holy Spirit led Paul to use that literary technique to teach and correct the Corinthians.

### Discuss

1. What was Paul’s primary concern when he thought of being accountable for his ministry?
2. In carrying out the ministry, why is it dangerous to “go beyond what is written”?
3. How did Paul imitate Christ by displaying a humble nature?
4. Paul told the Corinthians to imitate him. In what respect were they to do this? Isn’t it arrogant for a Christian to say “Imitate me” to others?

### Apply

5. What can members of a congregation rightfully expect of their pastor? What do members have no right to expect of their pastor?
6. What can members of a congregation do when their pastor is suffering persecution?

*Christian pastors recognize that they are servants of Christ and yet have become servants to the people they serve.*

# 1 Corinthians 5

## Christian unity requires church discipline

### Look

- Verse 1      It seems that a member of the Corinthian congregation was having sexual relations with his stepmother.
- Verse 7      Paul compares the ongoing sin in the Corinthian congregation to yeast that was not removed from Jewish homes prior to the Passover observance. (See Deuteronomy 16:1–4.) Yeast was a symbol of sin that corrupted the whole house—in this case, the whole congregation.

### Discuss

1. How did the Corinthian Christians react to the ongoing, unrepented sin that was taking place among them?
2. What factors may have led to this sinful tolerance?
3. How would handing this man over to Satan have the effect of destroying this man's sinful nature?
4. Paul did not just tell the Corinthians what to do. He wove the gospel into the discussion. How did he do that? (verses 6–8)

### Apply

5. Paul reminded the Corinthians that it is impossible not to associate with sinners. To do so, Christians would have to leave society. He is telling Christians not to associate with an immoral "brother." Apply this to a Christian who feels guilty about working alongside a person who is committing adultery.

*A Christian congregation serves the Lord when it lovingly practices church discipline.*



# 1 Corinthians 6

## Paul addresses the problems of lawsuits and sexual impurity

### Look

Verse 2 Paul's argument is from the greater to the lesser: Christians who will stand at Christ's side and judge the world (including angels—verse 3) with Christ on the Last Day are certainly able to settle disputes in earthly matters.

### Discuss

1. What was wrong with the Corinthians taking their grievances with one another to the civil courts?
2. What warning did Paul give the Corinthians in verses 9 and 10?
3. How did Paul weave in the gospel as he admonished the Corinthians? (verse 11)
4. Paul quoted some popular sayings of his day, sayings people used to justify sin. What three principles did Paul present as he countered these sayings?
5. Paul condemned the rampant fornication prevalent in those days. Sexual immorality contained no stigma in society, particularly since it was used in idol temples as a way to worship the gods. How did Paul weave the gospel into his rebuke of the Corinthians?

### Apply

6. Under what circumstances may Christians take their grievances to public courts? (See Acts 16:37 and 25:9–11.)
7. What dangers does the Internet pose for sexual purity?

*Paul reminded the Corinthians that God had called them to live peaceful and pure lives.*

# 1 Corinthians 7:1–16

## Christians honor God by their attitudes toward marriage

### Look

Verse 12 *"I say (I, not the Lord)." Paul does not mean that the apostle was injecting personal, uninspired words into this book of the Bible. A look at verse 10 will clarify matters. There Paul referred to something Jesus had already said, so he could say, "I give this command (not I, but the Lord)." But in verse 12 there was no prior statement of the Lord to which Paul could refer his readers, so the Holy Spirit led him to write "I say (I, not the Lord)."*

### Discuss

1. What reason for marriage does Paul give in verses 1 and 2?
2. This reason (question 1) and what Paul says about each spouse not having complete ownership of his or her body led Paul to draw an application to marriage. What is it?
3. What special "gift" did Paul have?
4. If certain differences make it impossible for two people to live together, Paul says they can separate. However, can they get a divorce?
5. What advice does Paul give Christians who are married to unbelievers?

### Apply

6. Would it be better for a pastor to be unmarried?
7. Some spouses argue that it is better for the kids if they get a divorce. After all, who wants to live with bickering adults? How do Christians respond?

*God not only instituted marriage, but he seeks to regulate it through his Holy Word. Christians honor the Lord when they honor marriage.*

# 1 Corinthians 7:17–40

## Christians are content in whatever situation God has placed them

### Look

- Verse 29 Paul does not demean marriage with these words. The context explains that married people are to keep the Lord, and not their spouses, first in their lives.
- Verse 39 *“Only in the Lord”*—This makes it sound like marrying an unbeliever is a sin. The Greek literally reads “only in the Lord,” which means that as one chooses a spouse, he or she should honor the Lord’s will. While Christians should never take marrying an unbeliever lightly (for doing so will cause many problems), we must be careful that we don’t make it a sin to do so.

### Discuss

1. In verses 17–24, Paul gives a principle that has profound implications for all Christian life. What is this principle?
2. Does this mean a person should not seek to get out of a difficult situation?
3. What does Paul mean by “the present distress”? (verse 26) Has that crisis passed?
4. Paul applies a general principle to marriage. What is the general principle Paul makes in verses 29–31?

### Apply

5. What encouragement would you give two 20-year-olds entering the holy estate of marriage?

*Christians should be content in whatever situation God has placed them. This has special applications for married people and those contemplating marriage.*

# 1 Corinthians 8

## Christians are to use their freedom carefully and responsibly

### Look

- Verse 1 In this chapter Paul treats the subject of eating meat associated with an idol temple. Eating such meat is an adiaphoron: an issue in life that God has neither commanded nor forbidden in his Word.
- Verse 7 In Paul's day many animals were sacrificed to heathen gods. Not all the meat was burned up, however. Most of it found its way into the market. Yet it was clear to all where the meat had come from.
- Verse 9 Christian freedom is not only the right to do something; it is also the right not to do something out of loving concern for others.
- Verse 10 Acting against one's conscience is a sin. Martin Luther included that thought in his famous stand at the Diet of Worms. He said, "I am bound by the Scriptures adduced by me, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God, and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience" (*Luther and His Times*, E. G. Schwiebert, p. 505).

### Discuss

1. What was the particular adiaphoron that was causing difficulty in the Corinthian congregation?
2. How would a "strong" Christian treat such meat? How would a "weak" Christian treat it?
3. How should the strong Christian act if what he does troubles the weak Christian?

### Apply

4. How does congregational life provide numerous opportunities to build up others with love?
5. How do the principles set down in this chapter apply to contemporary adiaphora: the use of alcoholic beverages, liturgical practices, individual communion cups, and so on?

*Christians are Christlike when they put others first in matters of adiaphora.*

# 1 Corinthians 9:1–23

## Christian ministry requires support and sacrifice

### Look

- Verse 15 Acts 18:1–3 explains why Paul could forego financial support from the Corinthian congregation.
- Verse 24 Paul's original readers could easily understand the reference to athletic contests, as the Olympic games had existed since 776 BC.

### Discuss

1. Paul often faced opposition from false teachers who denied his apostleship. We are not told specifically that this was the case in Corinth, yet from what Paul says, it is clear he was answering criticism. What proofs of his apostleship did Paul offer?
2. In this chapter, Paul's main point is that he supported himself while at Corinth so as not to be a burden to them or to make it seem as if he was preaching for pay. To prepare for that point, Paul makes it clear that Christian leaders and pastors have a right to earn their living off the gospel. What argument does Paul use in verse 7? in verses 8–11? in verse 13?
3. Why did Paul forego his right to receive assistance?
4. What does it mean to become all things to all people?

### Apply

5. Show how this section of the Bible applies not only to pastors but also to all Christians in their daily living.

*Christian pastors can expect to receive support from those who benefit from their ministry. At the same time, Christian pastors and their members may want to give up specific rights and privileges in the interest of enlarging God's kingdom.*

# 1 Corinthians 9:24–10:13

## Christians are to avoid the sins Israel committed

### Look

- 10:4 Even though God's Son would not take on human flesh until many years later, the people of Israel enjoyed his presence already in Moses' time.
- 10:8 In this and the following two verses, Paul alludes to incidents from Israel's history. See Numbers chapters 14, 16, 21, and 25.

### Discuss

1. What comparison does Paul make between athletic competition and striving for heaven?
2. What blessings had God given the Israelites? How did they use these blessings?
3. What warning does Paul give us? What comfort does Paul give us?

### Apply

4. Why must we, in our modern world, go into strict training and beat our bodies?
5. Think of a time when you became proud and fell into some sin. Think of a time when you experienced the fulfillment of God's promise to protect you from temptation. If appropriate, share that experience.

*We must maintain control over our lives, not fall into sin as Israel did, and must keep from becoming proud. When temptations arise, we can trust in our Lord to help us.*

# 1 Corinthians 10:14–11:1

## Have fellowship with God, not with idols

### Look

- 10:18 *“Those who eat the sacrifices”*—Earlier Paul had spoken about eating meat sacrificed to idols (bought in the market). Here he is speaking about taking part in an idol feast. The first was an adiaphoron, the latter was not.
- 10:25 *“Whatever is sold in the meat market”*—Paul returns to his earlier discussion, eating meat bought in the market place. Now we are dealing with an adiaphoron.

### Discuss

1. Paul often takes the gospel and places it into the middle of the discussion and then shows how a person cannot believe the gospel and at the same time engage in this or that sin. How does Paul do that
  - by bringing the Lord’s Supper into the discussion?
  - by bringing Israel’s sacrificial life into the discussion?
2. Picture the situation Paul depicts in verses 27–30. You go to a friend’s house and meat that originated in an idol temple is placed before you. Describe how the scene might play out.
3. What is behind everything a Christian does in life?

### Apply

4. We might find it odd that Christians would even entertain the idea of taking part in an idol feast. Yet it was a problem in ancient society. What things do Christians today become involved in that might shock ancient Christians?
5. How does this chapter demonstrate that a Christian cannot in good conscience become involved in religious or semireligious organizations that deny or water down the deity of Christ?

*Christians strive to keep away from anything that compromises their faith, and they will defer to others in love.*

# 1 Corinthians 11:2–16

## Christian worship is to reflect the roles of men and women

### Look

Paul's discussion in this section leads us to conclude that there were some problems among the Corinthians regarding the roles of men and women. Specifically, it seems they were not applying this principle in their worship life (see 14:33–35).

Verse 3 Paul's words about the relationship of men and women describe a hierarchical relation between them, not their value or status before God. Men and women enjoy equality before God as his redeemed children (see Galatians 3:28).

Verse 5 *"As if her head were shaven"*—A shaved woman was a prostitute. Paul is saying that a woman who does not cover her head was acting as shamelessly as a prostitute.

Verse 6 *"Cover her head"*—It seems as if Paul is referring to a custom of the time (note the comment on verse 5). Many Christian churches have decided to adopt this custom, which can be a fine expression of the roles of the men and women. Yet it is wrong to insist on following the practice, since it was based on custom.

### Discuss

1. Paul lists four people (or groups of people) and says there is a headship relation among them. List the four people and describe the nature of their relationship.
2. When was this relationship established between men and women? (verses 8–9)
3. The relationship between men and women could lead a person to think the two should live independently. How does Paul correct that mistaken notion? (verses 11–12)

### Apply

4. Why do we not insist that women wear hats to worship?
5. Some congregations wish to establish their customs apart from other churches in their fellowship. Why is this dangerous?

*Christians glorify God when the order of creation is reflected in their worship services.*



# 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

## Christian worship calls for Christian love

### Look

From what Paul says in this section, it is clear that some members were showing disdain toward the poor in their congregations. This was causing them to misuse the Lord's Supper, the common meal in which all members of the church remembered Christ's suffering and death and partook of his body and blood.

Verse 17     *"It is not for the better but for the worse"*—This scathing remark is one of the strongest Paul ever leveled against a congregation. This section includes much on the Lord's Supper, but it is really not about the Lord's Supper itself. Rather, it is about the favoritism and unloving attitudes in the Corinthian congregation. To correct the problem, Paul places the Lord's Supper into the center of the discussion, with the prayer that the Corinthians will shape their attitudes around the Supper they *all* participate in, rather than in their different incomes.

Verse 19     *"There must be factions among you."* Divisions are always the result of sin. But sometimes divisions serve a good purpose. When a group is physically divided because one party is teaching wrongly, it is easier to know which group is in the right and avoid the wrong.

Verse 20     *"It is not the Lord's supper that you eat."* Paul was not saying that the body and blood of Christ were not present among the Corinthians because of their abuses. Quite the opposite (verse 29). Rather, he was impressing on the Corinthians that their lack of love was turning the meal into something the Lord Jesus would never condone.

### Discuss

1. In what way were the Corinthians coming to the Lord's Table unprepared?
2. What was happening to many in the Corinthian congregation because they were eating and drinking the Lord's Supper in an unrepentant spirit?

### Apply

3. How can we judge ourselves before we partake of the Lord's Supper?
4. Some criticize the practice of close(d) Communion as being unreasonable and unloving. What good reason for this practice does Paul mention?

*Christians glorify God with worship that is orderly, respectful, and sincere.*

# 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a

## The Christian church and its uniquely gifted members

### Look

The Corinthians were having trouble properly using their spiritual gifts. The specific problems come to light in chapter 14. In chapter 12, Paul explains the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts.

Verses 4–6     *“Gifts . . . service . . . activities”*—These are all ways of viewing and categorizing the special abilities the Lord has given us for work in his church.

### Discuss

1. The Corinthians were selfishly misusing their gifts. What truth does Paul point out in verses 4–6 that makes such selfishness an obvious sin against the Lord?
2. What great purpose are spiritual gifts to serve?
3. Why do you think Paul brings up the concept of unity in verses 12 and 13?
4. What does the comparison of the church with the human body illustrate?
5. In verses 21–26, Paul extends the picture of the body. He reminds us that we treat the different parts of the body in different ways, creating an equality of honor among the various parts. What point does Paul want to make here?

### Apply

6. Can we today expect to be given all the spiritual gifts Paul lists?
7. How does a zealous use of our spiritual gifts help our congregations and synod?

*In a masterful way, Paul addressed the factious makeup of the Corinthian congregation by demonstrating the wonderful unity of the Christian church.*

# 1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:13

## The importance of Christian love

### Look

13:1 The Greek word for love Paul uses throughout this chapter describes a love that seeks to imitate God's own love.

### Discuss

1. What is the connection between this chapter and the previous chapter on spiritual gifts? (verses 1–3)
2. In what ways is Paul's definition of Christian love (verses 4–7) both humbling and comforting?
3. When will the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge not be needed?
4. At the end of verse 13, Paul says that the greatest quality in our Christian lives is love. Use verses 8–12 to explain why love is the greatest quality we can have.
5. What is the difference between faith and hope?

### Apply

6. Paul mentions the many activities and attitudes Christian love produces. People in the world often try to copy these qualities. Apart from Christ, however, what are the only motivations left for showing such "love"?
7. How does Christian love bless congregational life?

*Comforted and strengthened by the love of Christ, Christians seek to wrap all of life's activities in love.*

# 1 Corinthians 14:1–25

## The proper use of spiritual gifts in public worship

### Look

- Verse 1      *“Prophesy”*—Today we would relate the gift of prophecy to preaching and teaching the Word of God. Prophecy in Paul’s day—at a time when the New Testament had not been completely written or assembled—included preaching and teaching from God’s Word. But it also included an element of direct revelation. God communicated directly with Christians, giving them words of instruction to share with fellow members. The use of this gift, however, was always subject to scrutiny from Old Testament Scriptures and the words of the apostles.
- Verse 2      *“Speaks not to men but to God”*—The apostle’s concern throughout this chapter is for a person to convey truths in intelligible language to others to build up their faith.
- Verse 21     Paul used the quotation from Isaiah to illustrate the truth that just as the unintelligible language of the conquering Assyrians was a sign of God’s anger on unbelieving Israel, so the unintelligible language of the Corinthian Christians was a sign for the hardened unbelievers around them (not the regular unbelievers who would often visit their services and needed to hear the clear words of law and gospel).

### Discuss

1. Why is the gift of prophecy better than the gift of tongues?
2. What is the point of the comparison to musical instruments? to foreign languages?
3. What advice did Paul give the Corinthians about the public use of the gift of tongues? (verses 13–19)

### Apply

4. We cannot be accused of misusing the gift of tongues in our public worship. Yet the principle of wanting to speak clearly and understandably applies to us. Are there some elements of our worship service that a visitor may not understand? What can we do to help?

*Christians are to seek order and use clear, intelligible language in their worship services to edify others and to glorify God.*

# 1 Corinthians 14:26–40

## Instructions for orderly worship

### Look

Verses 26, 30 “A revelation”—Compare this with the note on prophecy (in the previous lesson). Revelation here is more than an insight into spiritual truth. God revealed his will to certain people in the early church (besides the apostles). This provided direction and help in the years before the New Testament books were written, collected, and disseminated. Yet, even so, such a gift could be open to abuse, so Paul made it clear that the words of the prophets had to be weighed by all.

### Discuss

1. What direction does Paul give in the following verses?
  - verse 26
  - verses 27 and 28
  - verses 29–33
  - verses 33–35
2. Who should be the first to acknowledge that what Paul said was true?
3. What is the key to God-pleasing worship? (verse 40)

### Apply

4. What should a single woman or widow in your congregation do if she wishes to ask a question or to give input to church leaders?
5. What are some examples of decent and orderly procedures in our worship services?

*Paul gave the Corinthians practical advice on how to worship in a fitting and orderly way.*

# 1 Corinthians 15:1–34

## The Bible's "Resurrection Chapter"

### Look

- Verse 8      *"One untimely born"*—Paul alludes to his spiritual deadness before he came to faith and to the lateness of his becoming an apostle.
- Verse 29     *"Baptized on behalf of the dead"*—This is a difficult passage. The most common interpretation is that people are baptized "in view of death," which implies a resurrection following death.
- Verse 32     *"Beasts at Ephesus"*—If Paul literally fought wild beasts in Ephesus, we know nothing about it. He may be referring to the persecution he faced there (see Acts 19:8–22 and 23–41).

### Discuss

1. What are the basics of the gospel?
2. What proof does Paul give us for the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?
3. Throughout Corinthians, Paul addressed problems in the Corinthian congregation. What problem did Paul address in this chapter? (verse 12)
4. What are the consequences of not believing in any resurrection?
5. What are the consequences of not believing in Jesus' resurrection?

### Apply

6. How is a Christian funeral service different from other funeral services?

*Jesus' resurrection is the foundation of our faith. Without it, we are dead in sin and believe in vain.*

# 1 Corinthians 15:35–58

## The Bible’s “Resurrection Chapter,” continued

### Look

Verse 45      *“The first man Adam”*—Here Paul compares Adam with Jesus. We received our physical life from Adam. We receive our spiritual life from Jesus. Some in Corinth were denying the resurrection. Their denial was based, at least in part, on the idea that our bodies cannot take any other form than what they have. To counter this argument, Paul describes the many forms matter takes, and how, in some cases, the form of matter changes. As people “in Christ,” we, too, will be changed someday.

### Discuss

1. Paul argues that just because our bodies appear humble now does not mean they will always be that way. How does he make that point through pictures of the following:
  - a seed
  - different kinds of animals
  - the varying splendor of the heavenly bodies
  - the natural vs. the spiritual body
2. What will happen to us on the last day?
3. How did Jesus remove the threat of the law and the guilt of sin?

### Apply

4. To labor in the Lord’s vineyard is often difficult work. In view of the resurrection, what does Paul urge us to do?

*Christians rejoice in Christ’s resurrection and look confidently to their own resurrection.*

# 1 Corinthians 16

## Paul's concluding comments and commendations

### Look

- Verse 1      The collection Paul refers to is an offering that he was gathering for the Christians in Jerusalem. Christians there were in the midst of a severe famine.
- Verse 8      Paul wrote this inspired letter to the Corinthian congregation while he was in Ephesus.
- Verse 20     The "holy kiss" was the custom of expressing fellowship among the believers.

### Discuss

1. What truths did Paul teach the Christians regarding the faithful stewardship of money?
2. Paul could not visit the Corinthians as soon as he would have liked. For what two reasons did he have to remain in Ephesus?
3. Why were the Corinthians to receive Timothy in love and treat him with respect?
4. On the basis of verses 21–24, describe the kind of man who wrote 1 Corinthians.

### Apply

5. Give specific ways your congregation can put verses 13 and 14 into practice.
6. What light do verses 15 and 16 shed on how we should treat workers in the church?
7. The final greetings in this chapter paint a picture of Christians who were separated by miles and yet cherished their fellowship. How can we do the same thing in our synod?

*Paul concluded his letter to the Corinthians with final instructions for their spiritual lives and with mutual greetings. 2 Corinthians 1:1–11*



# 2 Corinthians 1:1–11

## Comforted to comfort

### Look

After wishing the Corinthians grace and peace, Paul praised God for comforting his people in tribulation so they could bring God's comfort to others. The content of this section is not difficult. But it is difficult to determine why Paul began his letter this way. But it will become clear when Paul begins to speak of his love and care for the Corinthians.

Verse 8           *"The affliction we experienced in Asia"*—Paul is probably referring to the riot incited by Demetrius the silversmith. (See Acts 19:23–41.)

### Discuss

1. How many times do you find a form of the word *comfort* in these verses?
2. God allowed great distress to come into Paul's life. What was the purpose of this suffering
  - in regard to the spiritual lives of the Corinthians? (verses 4–7)
  - in regard to Paul's own spiritual life?
3. To what extent did Paul suffer? Can you find in these verses an allusion to God's role in Jesus' resurrection? How did this comfort Paul?
4. Paul never seemed to do anything without keeping the entire church in mind. What important role could the Corinthians play when Paul was undergoing persecution? How would Christians from other places become involved in a circle of spiritual blessings? (verses 10b, 11)

### Apply

5. When has someone been able to comfort you because of how God comforted them?
6. Agree or disagree. God is more likely to help a person who is being supported by the prayers of his fellow Christians.

*Paul rejoiced in the comfort God gave him, and he saw it as a source of blessing to himself, the Corinthians, and all Christians.*

# 2 Corinthians 1:12–22

## Paul explains his change of plans

### Look

How closely Paul's life was bound up in the lives of the Corinthians and their lives in his! It was important for the Corinthians to know that. That is why Paul began this letter as he did—pointing out how both his afflictions and comfort were geared toward the Corinthian's spiritual well-being. He must continue to help them understand how much he loved them. Why? Because he had decided to postpone his trip to Corinth, and some in Corinth were taking that as a sign that Paul was uncaring and fickle.

Verse 12      *"Not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God"*—Paul did not make plans to suit his own needs and wants. Rather, he followed where God graciously led him. He knew that whatever God does, he does for the sake of his kingdom. Paul had to change his plans when God led him to do so.

Verse 17      *"Yes, yes' and 'No, no"*—Paul had not been talking out of both sides of his mouth, in a worldly way, when he planned to visit the Corinthians.

### Discuss

1. By God's grace, and through Titus's ministry, many of the Corinthians' problems had been solved. But there were still some in the congregation who questioned Paul's motives and sincerity. Explain three reasons Paul gives for the Corinthians to trust him.
  - Verse 12a
  - Verses 12b, 13a
  - Verses 13b, 14
2. Explain Paul's original itinerary. Describe the change he made.
3. Read between the lines of verse 17. How were some of the Corinthians attacking Paul?
4. How was Paul's way of dealing with the Corinthians fashioned after the way Jesus treats us?

### Apply

5. God has given us many blessings that assure us he will remain faithful. What are those blessings?

*Paul's change of plans stemmed from a sincere desire to serve the Corinthians.*

# 2 Corinthians 1:23–2:11

## Paul wants only God's blessings for the Corinthians

### Look

Paul explained why he changed his plans and how he did it out of love for the Corinthians.

- 2:1            *"Another painful visit"*—This cannot refer to Paul's visit on his second missionary journey. Evidently, sometime during his long stay in Ephesus, which he had just completed, Paul had made one or more trips to Corinth, which proved to be painful because of the problems there.
- 2:4            *"For I wrote to you"*—This probably refers to 1 Corinthians.
- 2:5            *"If anyone has caused pain"*—See 1 Corinthians 5:1–13. The present verses are a sequel to that account.
- 2:11          *"[Satan's] designs"*—If the Corinthians had not forgiven the man, Satan would have won the battle by leading this man into despair. Paul wanted to avoid that tragedy as much as he had wanted to keep Satan from gaining this man's soul through unrepentant sin.

### Discuss

1. Why did Paul change his plans?
2. Paul used the term "spare you." Some in Corinth might pick up on this and question Paul's attitude toward them. What charge might they make, and how does Paul answer it?
3. On the basis of verses 2–4, what would it have been like if Paul had carried out his initial plans? What did he want his visit to them to be like?
4. Paul had encouraged the Corinthians to exclude a man from the congregation for engaging in incest. Now he had to encourage them to do something else. What had this man done? What did Paul encourage the Corinthians to do?

### Apply

5. St. Paul's voters are hesitant about acting on the recommendation of the Board of Elders to excommunicate a member who refuses to give up a certain sin. How might verses 5–11 help them carry out their Christian duty? Is excommunication the opposite of showing love?

*Paul told the Corinthians why he had changed plans. He also encouraged them to forgive the repentant sinner.*

# 2 Corinthians 2:12–3:6

## Paul's message brings life through the Spirit

### Look

Before Paul completed the thoughts of verses 12 and 13, he broke into words of thanksgiving for the gospel and for his personal ministry as a missionary. This section, which continues through 7:4, will help Paul deal with the false apostles in Corinth. This is the heart of the letter.

- 2:14            *"Triumphal procession"*—Paul was thinking of the kind of process a conquering general would put on after a victory. Incense would be burned. When the victors smelled this incense, it meant victory and life. When the defeated smelled it, it meant they would soon die.
- 2:16            *"Who is sufficient for these things?"* Paul was not asking a rhetorical question that begs the answer "no one." He was asking a question that he would answer. Men like himself, Timothy, and Titus are, by God's grace, equal to this task.
- 3:6             *"Letter . . . Spirit"*—*Letter* refers to the law. It kills because it condemns. *Spirit* refers to the Holy Spirit who gives us faith through the gospel. The Spirit gives life because he joins us to Christ.

### Discuss

1. Why did Paul have difficulty preaching the gospel in Troas, even though the Lord had given him an open door to do so?
2. Contrast the motives and methods of a false prophet with those of a true prophet. (verse 17)
3. Why didn't Paul need a physical letter of recommendation in order to continue his work among the Corinthians? What was Paul's letter?

### Apply

4. Christians want to be good witnesses for the gospel. What should we do first? (verses 4–6)

*Paul broke off into a description of the gospel ministry, which would enable the Corinthians to know and understand him.*

# 2 Corinthians 3:7–18

## The glory of the new covenant

### Look

- Verse 7      *“The ministry of death”*—The Mosaic Law, which people could not keep, judged them guilty and worthy of death.
- “Moses’ face”*—Paul referred to the fact that every time Moses went into God’s presence, he came away with his face glowing with God’s glory.
- Verse 11     *“Being brought to an end”*—The reflected glory on Moses’ face would fade away in time. When Moses talked to the people, he let them see the glory of the law. This impressed on them God’s holiness and perfection.
- Verse 12     *“Put a veil over his face”*—Moses wanted the Israelites to see the glory of God’s law. But he did not want them to see it fading away lest they get the impression that it was not serious. So he put a veil over his face to prevent that.

### Discuss

1. Both ministries (Moses’ ministry of the law and Paul’s ministry of the gospel) were glorious. But their glory was not equal. Explain.
2. Evidently, Paul’s detractors wanted to uphold the glory of the law. Paul never said the law did not have glory. What did he say? (verse 10)
3. Discuss the image of the veil from the information in the Look section above. Why did Moses put on the veil? Why did Paul not put on a veil?
4. Paul shifts the picture a bit. Now the veil is on the hearts of the unbelieving Jews. What is this veil? How alone is it taken away?

### Apply

5. Describe the truth of verse 18 with a reference to your life.

*Paul talked about the glory of the gospel that grows brighter in contrast to the glory of the law that fades away.*

# 2 Corinthians 4:1–6

## Paul presents the gospel of Christ clearly

### Look

Verse 4      *“The god of this world”*—Satan is called a god not because he actually is a god but because people worship him as such. Anything that people put in the place of the true God becomes their own personal god.

Verse 6      *“The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”*—If you want to see God, then look at Jesus, his Son. God’s glory—his love, mercy, and faithfulness to his covenant— is reflected in the face of Christ. And we who know Christ reflect that glory (3:18).

### Discuss

1. Where did Paul receive the strength to carry out his ministry?
2. Why did Paul not lose heart, even when he faced lack of success and persecution?
3. What did Paul refuse to do to make his ministry a “success”? What did he do?
4. Why do some people not believe the gospel?

### Apply

5. What might be some “disgraceful” and “underhanded” ways of doing the work of the ministry?
6. In what respect is evangelism a simple task?

*Paul presented the gospel clearly, without distorting it. He did so because he knew God would use the gospel to shine into people’s hearts and give them faith in Jesus.*

## 2 Corinthians 4:7–18

### Missionaries are only jars of clay who carry the treasure of the gospel

#### Look

- Verse 7      *"This treasure"*—The treasure of the gospel is also called "the Spirit," "the ministry of righteousness," "the surpassing glory," "the truth," and "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."
- Verse 10     *"The death of Jesus"*—This is a reference to the persecution and suffering Paul endured for the sake of the gospel.
- Verse 13     *"I believed, and so I spoke."* This quotation is from Psalm 116:10. The psalmist had three things in common with Paul, which may be why Paul chose to quote this psalm: Both the psalmist and Paul had just gone through a time of great affliction, were delivered from their affliction, and were thankful for God's deliverance.

#### Discuss

1. Paul contrasted the glory of the preceding sentence (the glory of the gospel) with the wretched nature of its bearers (jars of clay). Why does the Lord put the gospel into jars of clay?
2. Contrast Paul's weakness and his strength in the midst of that weakness.
  - "afflicted . . . , but not \_\_\_\_\_"
  - "perplexed, but not driven to \_\_\_\_\_"
  - "persecuted, but not \_\_\_\_\_"
  - "struck down, but not \_\_\_\_\_"
3. As Paul was "given over to death for Jesus' sake," what became more and more visible in Paul's life?
4. In verse 16 Paul repeated the thought of verse 1. Summarize Paul's reasons for not losing heart. (verses 16–18)
5. What two goals did Paul have for his ministry? (verse 15)

#### Apply

6. Why can a Christian rejoice even in affliction?

*Paul continued to describe the minister of the gospel. He is a jar of clay. But because of this, the success of his work must be attributed to God.*

# 2 Corinthians 5:1–10

## We live by faith that someday we will be in heaven

### Look

Paul changed the picture from jars of clay to tents. A tent is a temporary dwelling, which is what our life on earth is.

Verse 10      *“That each one may receive what is due”*—Paul was not teaching work-righteousness. He was simply acknowledging that a person who lives life apart from God will not serve God and will be judged for his or her sin. And a believer who is clothed in Christ’s righteousness and who serves the Lord in freedom from the law will be judged innocent. (See Matthew 25:31–46.)

### Discuss

1. Fear often prevents a person from doing something dangerous. Paul lived in the midst of danger his whole life, yet he boldly continued serving the Lord. Why? (verse 1)
2. In what way is going to heaven becoming clothed? (See 1 Corinthians 15:53–57.)
3. When Paul felt his flesh and body, in a roundabout way he was assured of something else. What is it? (verses 6, 7)
4. Read Philippians 1:21–24. How does this help you understand verse 8?

### Apply

5. Why can you be sure that someday God will take you to live with him in heaven? (verse 5)
6. What role does the judgment play in Christian motivation to serve the Lord?
7. How does the prospect of eternal life shape the way you live now?

*Paul spoke about his hope of eternal life. It shaped the way he lived his life.*



# 2 Corinthians 5:11–15

## Christ's love compels us

### Look

Verse 13      *"Beside ourselves"*—This was what Paul seemed like to many. The intensity of his labor, the risks he took, the persecutions he endured, and the foolishness of his gospel all seemed to point out that he was crazy. Everything he did, though, was done in service to God. (Also see Mark 3:21.)

*"In our right mind"*—When Paul was quietly and soberly teaching the Corinthians, making plans, and organizing the church with the help of faithful and sober-minded men, he worked not for himself but for the Corinthian church.

### Discuss

1. Review what Paul said in verse 10. What did this knowledge compel him to do?
2. Paul's detractors in Corinth were judging his motives. So far in this letter, Paul had been revealing his heart and motives. In this respect, what hope did Paul express in verse 11?
3. Explain the line of thought in verse 12. Focus on these phrases:
  - "not commending ourselves"
  - "giving you cause to boast about us"
  - "able to answer those"
  - "outward appearance and not . . . the heart"
4. What compelled Paul to do what he did?

### Apply

5. Paul wrote, "One has died for all, therefore all have died." Apply those words to yourself, to your unbelieving neighbor.
6. How are you tempted to live for yourself? How does your hope in Christ steer you in the other direction?

*Paul continued to speak about his love and zeal for the Corinthians' faith. He began to explain the heart of the gospel message—that Jesus has won forgiveness for all people.*

## 2 Corinthians 5:16–6:2

### You are reconciled to God. Be reconciled to God!

#### Look

- 5:16 *“According to the flesh”*—Considering their leaders from a worldly point of view was at the heart of the Corinthians’ problems. (See 1 Corinthians 1:10–12.) They even considered Christ in this way—as simply one among many leaders. That’s what Paul had done earlier in life when he persecuted the church.
- 5:18 *“Reconciliation”*—This word is central to the gospel ministry. Paul defined his ministry as “the ministry of reconciliation.” To reconcile is to take two parties who are enemies and bring them together as friends. God and man are hostile to each other. God’s justice demands punishment. Our sinful nature rebels against God, and by nature we are his enemies. Paul’s ministry was to bring these two parties together in friendship and peace through the preaching of reconciliation.

#### Discuss

1. Some define Christians as nice people, as people who live by the golden rule, or as people who believe in God. But it goes much deeper. How did Paul describe Christians in verse 17?
2. How did Paul describe the “ministry of reconciliation” in verse 19?
3. As Paul preached the message of God’s reconciliation in Christ, he did make an appeal to his hearers to do something. What was that? (verses 20, 21)

#### Apply

4. How do we make sure we don’t receive God’s grace in vain?

*God reconciled the world to himself in Christ. That is the church’s message. That alone makes people new creatures.*

# 2 Corinthians 6:3–13

## Paul does nothing to discredit his ministry

### Look

The message of reconciliation is the greatest message anyone can hear. Knowing that God is at peace with us in Christ gives us new life, new hope, and freedom from the law and death. Paul's entire life was dedicated to preaching this message and avoiding anything that would cause it to be discredited. In this section he describes his life and the lives of all true ministers of the gospel.

### Discuss

1. Paul did not detract from the gospel. Rather, he commended himself to people by his sufferings and the help he received from God. Evaluate Paul's life based on
  - what he suffered with great endurance for the gospel (three groups of three).
    - some general afflictions
    - afflictions others caused him
    - afflictions he allowed himself to endure
  - the godly attitude he displayed as he carried out his ministry (two groups of four).
  - the tools God gave him (one group of three).
  - how the world viewed him in contrast to what he really was in Christ (seven contrasts).
2. The Corinthians accused Paul of treating them heartlessly. After everything Paul had said, he could respond to this accusation. What did he say?

### Apply

3. Agree or disagree. If Christians today aren't suffering much for the gospel, it probably means they aren't doing much to fulfill their call as Christ's ambassadors.
4. Agree or disagree. If Christians today aren't filled with the Holy Spirit, with joy, with growth in faith, they aren't doing much to fulfill their call as Christ's ambassadors.

*Paul lived so as not to discredit the gospel. He endured much, was blessed with much, and was misunderstood by many as he fulfilled his apostolic office.*

# 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:4

## Let us purify ourselves from all evil

### Look

With these verses we come to Paul's final thoughts on the glory of the ministry of the new covenant. This section began in 2:14. In these verses Paul told his readers that the ministry of the new covenant

surpasses the ministry of the old covenant (2:14–4:6)

is a treasure in jars of clay (4:7–5:10)

is a ministry of universal reconciliation (5:11–6:10)

Paul then urged the Corinthians to separate themselves from unbelievers. If they didn't do that, they would separate themselves from God, from Paul, and from the new covenant.

7:4                *"I am filled with comfort."* This verse forms a transition to the next section. It picks up the thought left off in 2:13.

### Discuss

1. What answer must be given to each of the five questions Paul raised?
2. Why are Christians the temple of God? What implication does that have for us?
3. There are two sides to a Christian's life. Can you find those two sides in verses 6:17–7:1?
4. How does Paul feel about the Corinthian Christians? (verses 3, 4)

### Apply

5. The Corinthians were joining themselves with unbelievers. What are some ways you have been, or perhaps still are, guilty of doing this? What can you do to get out of this situation?
6. Describe a situation in which parishioners today might do well to open their hearts to their pastor or one of their teachers?

*Paul encouraged believers not to be joined with unbelievers but to treasure the gospel.*

# 2 Corinthians 7:5–16

## Titus's report puts to rest Paul's fears and gives him joy

### Look

In these verses Paul returned to the thought he was speaking about in 2:14: his anxiety at not finding Titus in Troas. In these verses Paul rejoiced over the Corinthians' change of heart as reported by Titus.

Verse 5        *"When we came into Macedonia"*—Paul had sent Titus to Corinth while he, Paul, was still in Ephesus. He arranged with Titus to meet him in Troas (north of Ephesus), where Titus was to give Paul his report. But Titus wasn't at Troas, and Paul, anxious over the outcome of Titus's work in Corinth, went to Macedonia (northern Greece, where Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were located). There Titus met him and gave him the report.

### Discuss

1. From verses 6–9, describe how the Corinthians had responded to Paul's letter (1 Corinthians) and to Titus's ministry among them.
2. Why, on the one hand, did Paul regret the sorrow he caused them and, on the other hand, not regret it?
3. What is the difference between "godly grief" and "worldly grief"?
4. In verses 11–16, Paul lists for the Corinthians all the fruits of faith the Holy Spirit worked in their hearts. Can you list them?

### Apply

5. A pastor lays before the congregation a challenge to practice church discipline or encourages them to do some other difficult thing. Certainly he prays that the congregation follow his will. But there is another important benefit when a congregation rises to the challenge. What is it?

*Paul encouraged the Corinthians with the joy he felt over Titus's report.*

# 2 Corinthians 8:1–9

## Excel in the grace of giving

### Look

Chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians form a unit. In these chapters Paul focused on the present need to complete the offering for the needy saints at Jerusalem. As Paul encouraged the completion of this offering, he placed before the Corinthians and us some key principles of stewardship, principles that guide our giving yet today.

Verse 1        *“Churches of Macedonia”*—These are churches of northern Greece: Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Other churches throughout Macedonia had probably been started by this time.

Verse 6        *“Titus . . . had started.”* Already before Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, Titus had begun work among the Corinthians regarding the offering. Paul had sent Titus to Corinth along with his first letter, among other things, to help the Corinthians finish the offering.

### Discuss

1. What could have made giving very difficult for the Christians in Macedonia?
2. What three things make the giving of the Macedonians remarkable?
  - Verse 3
  - Verse 4
  - Verse 5
3. Why were the Macedonians able to give so generously? How could the Corinthians follow their example?
4. In verses 8 and 9, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give by doing three things. First, he made it clear that he did not command them. Christian giving must be performed willingly, not under compulsion. What were the next two points Paul made, both designed to foster in the Corinthians a willingness to give?

### Apply

5. A congregation has financial problems. Yet their needs are never brought to the Lord in the general prayer in the worship service on Sunday morning. What is wrong with this?

*Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give, just as the Macedonians had done.*

# 2 Corinthians 8:10–24

## Paul's advice on gathering the offering

### Look

Verse 23      *"They are messengers of the churches."* Sometime earlier, Paul had begun a collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem. He made sure each group of churches supplied a representative to verify that their gift was delivered as promised.

### Discuss

1. What was the basic principle the Corinthians were to follow in their giving?
2. The "abundance" the gentile Christians supplied to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem was, of course, money. What was the "abundance" the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were providing to the gentile Christians? (See Romans 15:26, 27.)
3. Why was Titus the best choice to help the Corinthians organize their offering?
4. Why does Paul urge the Corinthians to show their love to Titus and to the two brothers who accompanied him?

### Apply

5. Peace Church doesn't worry too much about its offering. Joe, the treasurer (the congregation doesn't have a financial secretary), usually puts the offering into a bag after church, counts it at home, and then deposits it. Joe is as honest as a person can be, so the church doesn't worry about their system. Comment.
6. Some Christians feel the church should not ask people to contribute to special needs. They feel Christians are motivated by love to give, not because there is some need thrust on them. Others think it is okay, since many do not give unless they are giving to a specific project. What do you think?

*Paul advised the Corinthians on giving, and he told them about Titus's willingness to help them.*

# 2 Corinthians 9

**Sow generously and confidently, relying on God's grace**

## Look

Verse 9            This quotation from Psalm 112 speaks of a grateful believer responding to God's generosity by generously sharing his gifts with others.

## Discuss

1. Paul had boasted to the Macedonians about the Corinthians' eagerness to contribute. But now was the time for final arrangements before the offering was delivered to the people in Jerusalem. What was Paul afraid might happen?
2. What promise does God attach to generous giving in verse 6?
3. How should the Corinthians determine how much to give?
4. List the benefits to God's church that would accompany the Corinthians' gift.
  - Verse 12
  - Verse 12
  - Verse 13
  - Verse 14

## Apply

5. Joyce wants to give. If she gives, she thinks she will have an easier time in life because God will increase her wealth. Is her attitude God pleasing?
6. Why is the right to give such a great gift?

*Paul encouraged the Corinthians to sow generously so they would reap generously. He described all the blessings that would result from their giving.*



# 2 Corinthians 10

## Paul defends his ministry

### Look

Chapter 10 begins the final major section of 2 Corinthians. Paul looked to the immediate future and his visit to Corinth and what that will mean to his opponents there. Although Titus had largely been successful in his work among the Corinthians, there was a continued presence of some troublemakers in Corinth who were still having an effect on a small minority of the congregation.

### Discuss

1. Of what did Paul's opponents accuse him?
2. Some people thought Paul lived and worked by the standards of this world, that is, that he was two-faced and served his own selfish interests. How did Paul counter this charge? (verses 3–5)
3. Verse 6 indicates that there were two groups of people at Corinth, each of which had to be dealt with in a different way. Which were these groups?
4. From verses 7–11, list several accusations Paul's enemies made against him.
5. By what standards were Paul's enemies evaluating themselves? How did Paul evaluate himself? Which was valid?

### Apply

6. Sometimes the leaders in a church must deal with a persistent errorist. Why do they need the spiritual support of the congregation before they can do this?
7. What happens when a congregation encourages missionaries to preach the gospel?

*Paul defended his ministry against his detractors and worked to build up the Corinthians in faith.*

# 2 Corinthians 11:1–15

## Paul claims his right to the Corinthians' loyalty

### Look

Verse 1      *"A little foolishness"*—Paul must continue to defend his ministry. Some leaders in Corinth were claiming they were superior to Paul. Paul knew that if their claims stood, the gospel would fall. Only when the Corinthians accepted his motives, his sincerity, and his ministry in general, would they accept his gospel.

### Discuss

1. In verse 2 Paul expressed his goal toward the Corinthians in a rather unusual yet wonderful way. Explain.
2. What was Paul afraid of? Look at each of these phrases:
  - "another Jesus"
  - "a different spirit"
  - "a different gospel"
  - "super-apostles"
3. How Paul supported himself while he worked among the Corinthians had become a point of contention for the "super-apostles." Explain Paul's policy toward compensation from those he served. (verses 7–10)
4. Because Paul followed this practice, the super-apostles were evidently accusing Paul of something. What was it? Can you figure out why they would make this accusation?
5. Paul said he would continue to refuse pay. Why?
6. Paul unmasked the super-apostles. With whom were they allied?

### Apply

7. Why do people turn to "another Jesus" or to "other gospels"?
8. Why is it not surprising that Satan's followers disguise themselves as angels of light?

*Paul rebuked the Corinthians for being easily swayed by the super-apostles.*

# 2 Corinthians 11:16–33

## Paul's "foolish" boasting

### Look

Throughout his ministry Paul's motto was "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). Now he does a different kind of boasting—about what he himself had done. How difficult this must have been for him to do!

Verse 16      *"Accept me as a fool."* In verses 16 to 21 Paul explained that he was forced to speak in a way he did not want to speak. In a masterful way Paul made it clear he was not stooping to the level of his detractors—he was not a fool. But since the Corinthians were duped into thinking he was a fool, he would use the opportunity to do a little foolish talking. But he distanced himself from the Lord Jesus, to make it clear that he was not patterning his speech after Christ's. Paul used irony to rebuke the Corinthians. How wise they were! Why, they even let themselves be abused! Paul admitted he was too weak to push them around like that. Again, it was irony mixed with a bit of sarcasm. But Paul explained himself and laid the foundation for his boasting.

### Discuss

1. Paul was being forced to "boast." Why?
2. Review the list of things Paul boasted about. What should this list lead the Corinthians to conclude about Paul? about the super-apostles?
3. What phrases in these verses tell us that Paul was very uncomfortable boasting like this?
4. Everything Paul boasted about displayed his weaknesses. Why would Paul want to display his weaknesses and not his strengths?

### Apply

5. How does verse 29 advise us to help people in their physical or spiritual problems?

*Paul was forced to boast about what he suffered for the Lord. If he had remained silent, he would have been understood as saying the super-apostles and their gospel were true.*

# 2 Corinthians 12:1–10

## Paul boasts of his vision and of his thorn in the flesh

### Look

- Verse 1      *“Though there is nothing to be gained”*—Christian leaders do not advance the cause of the gospel by preaching about their own personal visions and religious experiences. They preach the gospel. That is what Paul meant when he qualified what he was about to do. But as we have seen, Paul was forced to boast, and he did so only to counteract what the super-apostles were doing. Quite possibly they were boasting about visions and experiences they had.
- Verse 2      *“Fourteen years ago”*—This happened before Paul’s first missionary journey when he was in Tarsus, waiting for the Lord to tell him what to do.  
*“Third heaven”*—Paul was referring to paradise. Some suggest that the first heaven is the clouds; the second, the starry skies.  
*“In the body or out of the body”*—Paul was not sure whether he had this vision in body and soul or if only his soul was involved.
- Verse 7      *“A thorn . . . in the flesh”*—The fact that it persisted suggests a sharp, nagging pain. This pain was something afflicting Paul’s body.

### Discuss

1. In verse 2 Paul spoke about “a man in Christ.” From the context it is clear that Paul was speaking about himself. Why would Paul speak in such a roundabout way about himself?
2. From whom did Paul receive his thorn in the flesh?
3. Why was Paul’s prayer really answered, even though his thorn was not taken away?
4. What paradox did Paul see at work in his life?

### Apply

5. How do these verses answer someone who says, “If a Christian believes strongly enough, God will remove every problem”?

*Paul continued boasting about a vision he had and about his thorn in the flesh.*

# 2 Corinthians 12:11–21

## Paul applies what he has said to his upcoming visit

### Look

In these verses Paul concluded his “boasting.” In a masterful way, Paul combined many thoughts. He talked about his relation to the super-apostles and reminded the Corinthians that he alone performed the marks of an apostle among them. He told them of his love for them, and again reminded them that he never asked for their possessions, nor did Titus. He expressed his fear that they may not be ready for his next visit. In this section Paul not only addressed the Corinthians; he also addresses Christian pastors throughout the ages, giving them a pattern to follow when they must address difficult issues.

### Discuss

1. Why did Paul boast about himself?
2. Why should it have been clear to the Corinthians that Paul was not inferior to the super-apostles?
3. The accusation about Paul’s not asking for wages—whatever form that may have taken—was evidently quite serious. Why did Paul and Titus not take money from the Corinthians?
4. In the previous chapters, Paul’s main goal was not to defend himself (as if he was primarily worried about his own reputation) but to strengthen the Corinthians. Titus had done well, and the Corinthians had grown through his ministry. What was Paul still afraid of?
  - verse 20
  - verse 20
  - verse 21

### Apply

5. Why can’t a pastor always be the way he wants to be with his people?
6. What is a better relationship for you to foster with your pastor—as a personal friend or a spiritual leader? Can a pastor be both?

*Paul concluded his boasting and expressed his fears about the Corinthians’ lack of spiritual maturity.*

# 2 Corinthians 13

## Paul's final warnings and greetings

### Look

Verse 1 *"The third time"*—Paul's first visit was when he started the congregation. His second visit probably took place sometime during the three years he worked in Ephesus (where he had just been).

Verse 9 *"We are glad when we are weak."* Paul's posture in his ministry was very meek, self-effacing, and subservient to the needs of the Corinthians. The super-apostles took this as a sign of weakness. Yet Paul was very "strong" when preaching the law. When he had to rebuke the Corinthians, he spoke clearly and to the point and did not shirk from saying exactly what the Corinthians needed to hear. Yet Paul wanted nothing other than to come to them in meekness, preaching the gospel and building up the Corinthians in faith. He was happy to be weak, for that meant the Corinthians were strong in the faith and ready to listen to Paul's words.

### Discuss

1. The super-apostles and their followers demanded proof that Christ was speaking through Paul. What would Paul do to prove that? (verses 2, 3a)
2. In what way was Paul's ministry among the Corinthians patterned after Christ's ministry?
3. If the Corinthians would examine themselves, what was Paul certain they would discover?
4. If they found that Christ was in them, the blessings could only have come through the ministry of Paul. In that case, what would they realize about Paul? (verse 6)

### Apply

5. How do we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith? When is a good time to do this?

*Paul looked forward to his next visit to the Corinthian congregation. He told them how much he wanted to visit them and continue to build them up in the faith.*