



Guercino, Saint Paul, between 1591 and 1666, pen and brush and brown ink over lead point and graphite, The Met Museum, New York. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 CORINTHIANS 1–6

COMFORT, TRIALS, ATONEMENT, FAITH (CA. AD 55–58)

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Introduction

This was not Paul's second letter to the early Corinthian converts, but it is the second one available and canonized. After his stern previous epistle, Paul follows up with an outpouring of comfort and love. It is filled with his devotion to the Corinthian Saints, which must have been healing for both parties.

Acts 18–20:3 outlines the historical background and chronology of this letter. After Paul served three years in Ephesus, he traveled west to visit the Saints in Corinth (that is, from modern-day Turkey to Greece). The fall season had already begun, making it unsafe to travel by sea, so Paul and his companions traveled by land and visited the Saints in northern Greece first. By the time Paul reached Macedonia, his messenger, Titus, had traveled from Corinth and met him with the news that the Corinthian disciples had humbly and meekly received Paul's call to repentance (2 Cor 7:5–9). Overjoyed with the report, Paul immediately wrote this letter to thank the Corinthians and notify them that he planned to

spend the winter with them. Paul sent the epistle ahead with Timothy, Erastus, and Titus, who returned immediately to Corinth to help prepare for Paul's visit (Act 19:21–22).

2 Corinthians 1

Greetings and comfort—2 Cor 1:1–11

2 Cor 1:1. *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth and . . . all Achaia.”* Paul's standard introduction includes his call from God as an Apostle (*apostolos*), “a messenger, envoy, delegate, one commissioned by another to represent him in some way, especially a man sent out by Jesus Christ Himself to preach the Gospel.”¹ Paul's coauthor, Timothy, was raised with his Greek father and his Jewish-Christian mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, who taught him the scriptures (Act 16:3; 1 Tim 1:5). He became Paul's “true son in the faith” and beloved younger companion (1 Tim 1:2 NIV). Timothy is a cosender of five other Pauline letters.² In this verse, the two send greetings to all the Saints spread across the Peloponnesus.

2 Cor 1:2. *“Grace be to you and peace from God.”* This is Paul's standard greeting in eight epistles.³ “Grace,” *charis*, most often refers to a gift or blessing from the Lord. It can also be translated as “favor, thanks, kindness or gratitude.”

2 Cor 1:3. *“the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.”* Paul introduces God the Father with a unique title: the God of all comfort. In Greek, *paraklesis* (“comfort”) can also mean “to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage.” Paul builds on the theme of comfort as a form of encouragement. Though, Paul usually uses *paraklesis* to refer to the Spirit's comfort. It was one of Paul's favorite words, and we find it as a noun and verb six times this epistle and twenty-three times throughout his other epistles. In these verses the Spirit's comfort is contrasted with life's afflictions. Paul sees suffering as part of the process of sanctification. In a sense, when Christians suffer for the gospel's sake, we suffer with Christ.

2 Cor 1:8–9 (NIV). *“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia . . . that we might not rely on ourselves but on God.”* Paul did not elaborate on the “sentence of death” (KJV) that he received in Asia but instead expressed gratitude for God's comfort through his trial. This experience may have been the uproar in Ephesus caused by the silversmiths who defended the silver shrines used in the worship of the goddess Diana (Act 19:23–41). Or it may have been an unrecorded event in which Paul was close to death (also referenced in Php 1:19–30).

2 Cor 1:11 (NIV). *“you help us by your prayers.”* Paul gives sincere thanks for the Saints' prayers for him because they helped him endure this trial. Praying for someone else becomes a Christian hallmark.

Paul's change of plans—2 Cor 1:12–2:4

2 Cor 1:12–16 (NIV). “*we have conducted ourselves . . . with integrity and godly sincerity. . . . I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia.*” Paul had to cancel his earlier plans to visit Corinth because of his enemies. He defends himself by explaining that God directed him to modify his trip.

2 Cor 1:21 (NIV). “*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us.*” Paul uses a play on words, as *Christ* and *anoint* share the same root. Likewise, the Hebrew *messiah* also means “anointed.” God the Father chose Jehovah as His Anointed One. Jesus’s anointing included enduring crushing pain in the place of the olive press, or *Gethsemane*. His Atoning sacrifice enables us to repent and be cleansed, anointed, and sealed. God’s anointing is like a powerful magnetic pull drawing us to our Savior through the work of the Spirit.

2 Cor 1:22 (NIV). “*set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts.*” God’s Spirit, seal, and anointing are connected. Elsewhere we read that in conjunction with ordinances, this anointing is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.⁴ The sealing is conditional upon the recipient’s obedience. The prophet Joseph Smith taught that another ordinance can seal it eternally.⁵ Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “To seal is to *ratify*, to *justify*, or to *approve*. Thus, an act which is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise is one which is ratified by the Holy Ghost; it is one which is approved by the Lord; and the person who has taken the obligation upon himself is justified by the Spirit.”⁶

2 Cor 1:23–24 (NIV). “*it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth . . . we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.*” Paul’s sees his delay as giving the Saints time to repent (“to spare you”) and strengthen their faith and stand accountable to God and His apostolic servant.

2 Corinthians 2

2 Cor 2:1–4 (BSB). “*I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. . . . For through many tears I wrote you . . . not to grieve you but to let you know how much I love you.*” Paul’s reproving was intertwined with great love for the Saints. He “had confidence in all” to change (BSB).

Forgiveness for those who offend us—2 Cor 2:5–11

2 Cor 2:5–8 (BSB). “*if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me but all of you—to some degree . . . you ought to forgive and comfort him . . . reaffirm your love for him.*”

Paul acknowledged how miserable it must have felt to receive the public scolding in his last letter. Once the offenders felt remorse, he asked the Saints to freely forgive the prodigals with love and comfort. Paul continued to blend encouragement with discipline in this letter.

2 Cor 2:9–10 (BSB). *“My purpose in writing you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him.”* Paul praises the Saints for obeying during trials and for offering forgiveness.

Triumph in Christ—2 Cor 2:12–16

2 Cor 2:12. *“when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord.”* As Paul presented the good news, or gospel, the Lord opened doors for him—just as He does for all who gather His sheep. Troas is mentioned in seven different verses and refers to the land of Troy (now northwest Turkey). It was a major port and center for Christians. Paul explained that he hoped to meet Titus in Troas, but the two did not meet up until they reached Macedonia (2 Cor 7:5).

2 Cor 2:14 (NKJV). *“thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.”* The image of the Lord triumphantly leading the saints evokes the traditional procession of a general parading at the head of his army after a victory.⁷ The disciples have the blessing and responsibility to spread the sweetness of the gospel message to the world.

2 Cor 2:15. *“For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ.”* Paul’s imagery of “sweet savour” referred to an honorable sacrifice; in the Old Testament, we find the phrase in forty-seven verses, always referring to the good fragrance of a sincere animal sacrifice. In the New Testament, Paul used it two other times (Eph 5:2; Php 4:18) referring to the Old Testament (for example, Gen 8:21; Ex 29:18).

Jesus and the Apostles taught the need for a different type of sacrifice in Christianity:

- “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” (Mt 9:13)
- “I sacrifice my life for the sheep.” (Jn 10:15 NLT)
- “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.” (Rom 12:1 NIV)
- “If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.” (Php 2:17)
- “Ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” (3 Ne 9:20)

The sacrifice of our will to make room instead for the Lord’s will has always been God’s desire. Yet, it was not until we had the example of Jesus that it was entirely understood. Elder Bruce C. Hafen wrote:

The Savior’s perfect submission to the Eternal Father is the very essence of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Christ’s example teaches us that a broken heart is an eternal attribute of godliness. When our hearts are broken, we are completely open to the Spirit of God and recognize our dependence on Him for all that we have and all that we are. The sacrifice so entailed is a sacrifice of pride in all its forms. Like malleable clay in the hands of a skilled potter, the brokenhearted can be molded and shaped in the hands of the Master.⁸

When we combine humility and obedience in doing the Lord's work, we present a sacrifice for God that has a sweet fragrance.

2 Corinthians 3

Ministers of the new covenant—2 Cor 3:1–6

2 Cor 3:1–2 (BSB). *“do we need . . . letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, inscribed on our hearts.”* Paul's question implies that some Corinthians wanted a letter of recommendation from him—perhaps to prove that he was an Apostle or that he truly loved them. This may have stemmed from the harshness of his rebuke or perhaps the schisms in their local church community (mentioned in 1 Cor 3:4). Paul used an ironic tone that may mean some enemies had come to Corinth and challenged his authority or ethics. But he felt that the clearest sign of his work and apostleship was the fruits of his labors. Basically, he asks the Saints, “Why do you want a written document when you can look at my fruits? You as converts received a witness of the Spirit, which is a far greater witness than a piece of paper and ink.” Paul trusted in God and testified confidently of the Spirit's witness.

2 Cor 3:3. *“not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”* The stone tablets given to Moses on Sinai were not as meaningful as the witness of the Spirit that can be recorded in one's heart.

2 Cor 3:5 (NIV). *“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”* Paul testified that he was not boasting; his “sufficiency” (KJV) or “adequacy” (NASB) was a sign of his faith in God. Paul conquered all challenges as a Christian throughout his apostolic missions with the courage and strength that grew from his confidence in God. He trusted that Christ had called him and that God would assist in His work.

2 Cor 3:6. *“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; . . . for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”* The KJV translates *diatheke* thirteen times as “testament” and twenty times as “covenant” (as in a covenant between two parties, including wills). The Greeks used *diatheke* as a legal term for a compact or covenant. In the Old Testament, *diatheke* represented God's covenant with people like Noah and Israel.⁹ Paul and Timothy (and modern Israel) served God by living their covenants and serving as “ministers of a new covenant” (NIV).

Glory in the new covenant—2 Cor 3:7–18

2 Cor 3:11 (NIV). *“if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!”* Three times Paul compares Moses's lower law to the Savior's glorious higher law. He describes the lower transitory law as the means to an end, while Christ's higher atoning law allows us to permanently return to the presence of God. Through God's Spirit, Christians may receive a greater level of undaunted determination: “Since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech” (NKJV).

2 Cor 3:13 (BSB). “*We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing.*” Paul referenced Ex 34:30–35, in which Moses had to cover his face because it shone so brightly after receiving God’s tablets of stone on Mount Sinai. In other words, Paul now asks Christians to let the Spirit of God, through the new covenant, stream from their faces.

2 Cor 3:14 (BSB). “*the same veil remains at the reading of the old covenant. It has not been lifted, because only in Christ can it be removed.*” Paul continued with the same analogy. He felt that the Jews figuratively covered their hearts and minds, which kept them from a spiritual witness of the new covenant. He assured them that someday when they turned to God, they would see clearly.

2 Cor 3:17–18 (BSB). “*where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into His image with intensifying glory.*” The Spirit of God provides not just freedom from sin and death but also potential growth in glory through sanctification. Different translations of these verses mention the Holy Spirit and Jesus in different orders. In the Restoration we know that all three members of the Godhead work together for the same purpose: “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Mose 1:39). The Spirit is the cleansing agent that transfers the Redeemer’s atoning sacrifice to repentant mortals.

2 Corinthians 4

Divine treasure received in our earthly vessels—2 Cor 4:1–7

2 Cor 4:1 (NIV). “*since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.*” Paul’s source of encouragement comes from the Spirit of God and from serving in the ministry. Specifically, at this time Paul was encouraged by God’s mercy given when the people repented and turned to the Lord (see also 4:16).

2 Cor 4:2 (NIV). “*by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.*” Paul and his missionary companions (“we”), have nothing to do with dishonesty or craftiness. They do not dilute the word of God that Jesus entrusted to His Apostles. Paul asked his audience to use their own conscience (and previously, he mentioned the Spirit) to judge if Paul taught truth.

The doctrine that God gives humans the ability to judge between truth and error was taught by Mormon.

I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil. . . . [Ye] know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ. (Moro 7:16–18)

Earlier in the Book of Mormon, Lehi taught that Christ's redemption empowered each person to be "free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon" (2 Ne 2:26). The text explains that wrong choices are a result of evil forces clouding one's judgment (2 Ne 2:11, 17–18, 27). Nevertheless, God gave each accountable human the innate agency to judge and the ability to act correctly through Christ's Atonement, which overcomes the Fall, and the Spirit of Christ that enlightens judgment.

2 Cor 4:3. *"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."* The Greek word for "hid" also means "I veil, conceal, envelop."¹⁰ Unlike worship in the Jewish temple, where the mercy seat or throne of God was veiled in the Holy of Holies, Christians may worship a living God directly through His mediating Son. Also, Paul did not cover his preaching with any hidden meanings.

2 Cor 4:4. *"the god of this world hath blinded the minds."* This is the only reference in the Bible to this title for Satan. The author John described Satan with similar phrases, like "prince of this world."¹¹ Paul described Satan's ability to veil or darken minds so that one cannot see or feel truth. Satan has less power over those who believe in Christ and humbly keep His covenants because the Spirit, a spiritual armor, can protect against Satan's counterfeits. Jesus's Spirit removes that blindness and frees believers from the power of the destroyer. The Lord taught that believing allows one to see spiritual things (D&C 5:16).

2 Cor 4:5 (ISV). *"we do not preach ourselves, but rather Jesus the Messiah as Lord, and ourselves as merely your servants for Jesus' sake."* Paul did not promote himself but wanted to act as a servant for Jesus, their Messiah. *Doulos*, here rendered "servant," is also translated "slave" (NET) and "bondservant" (NKJV).

2 Cor 4:6 (NIV). *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts . . . [and] displayed in the face of Christ."* Paul returned to the Creation theme from Gen 1:3, when the earth was dark and the Creator brought forth light. Likewise, when we are in spiritual darkness, He can bring light to shine in our hearts. When we feel the Spirit of God, we do not harbor darkness. The light of the gospel may be experienced by believing in God. Often in the scriptures, the knowledge of God is to see His face. Paul received that knowledge (Act 22:11). God promised His disciples this knowledge in the Restoration: all who "forsaketh [their] sins, and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face, and know that I am" (D&C 93:1).

2 Cor 4:7 (CEV). *"We are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored. The real power comes from God and not from us."* We do not have to wait until we see God to know of this light. Even in our "earthen vessels," or earthly bodies made from clay or soil, we can experience the treasure of God's light (Gen 2:7). The KJV "excellency" is also translated "transcendent, surpassing, overwhelming."

Suffering produces perseverance—2 Cor 4:8–12

2 Cor 4:8. *"we are perplexed, but not in despair."* Paul admitted that his life and service as an Apostle was still hard at times. He shared four examples of the Lord lifting him up and helping him carry

his burdens. With the spirit of hope, he was not overwhelmed with despair. Even in his persecution, he felt supported by God (and so can all Christians).

2 Cor 4:11 (NIV). *“we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.”* Paul’s missionary service took a heavy toll on his physical body over the years. He endured exhausting travel, deprivations, and repeated physical torture (2 Cor 11:23–27). Yet, repeatedly, he also experienced God’s miraculous gift of healing within and without.

Although disciples now are rarely stoned and tortured, God still asks us to follow and obey when it requires sacrifice. Disciples who manifest Christ in their bodies treat others with charity, maintain hope and faith, magnify their stewardships, accept setbacks, and stand up for truth in spite of challenges.

Sustained by hope of heaven—2 Cor 4:13–18

2 Cor 4:13 (NKJV). *“we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke.’”* Paul paraphrases Ps 116:10 and attributes his motivation to preach to his belief or testimony. Elsewhere Paul credits the Spirit’s witness and promptings as the source of his belief.¹²

2 Cor 4:14 (NIV). *“we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.”* The hope of the Resurrection dominates Paul’s witness.

2 Cor 4:15 (NIV). *“so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow.”* Paul re-emphasizes this point from verse 12. His missionary work night and day brought God’s grace to more. All who receive God’s abundant grace give thanks and will join in glorifying Him.

2 Cor 4:16 (NIV). *“we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”* Missionary work—especially Paul’s—was and is physically, emotionally, and spiritually taxing. Yet, God rejuvenated Paul’s spirit, or “inward man,” daily.

2 Cor 4:17 (BSB). *“For our light and momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory that is far beyond comparison.”* Paul kept an eternal perspective, which helped him endure his mortal afflictions and focus on God’s rewards.

2 Cor 4:18 (NIV). *“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen . . . [or] eternal.”* Paul encouraged his audience to follow his example and seek delayed gratification. He looked beyond the temporal physical challenges and focused on the eternal matters.

2 Corinthians 5

Sure hope: The Atonement—2 Cor 5:1–6

The next several verses have given rise to much conflicting commentary by biblical scholars trying to figure out what Paul meant. We are blessed to have restored truths that shed light on the Resurrection.

2 Cor 5:1. “*we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*” Paul used the imagery of the Israelites’ tabernacle (many translations use “tent”) to represent the mortal body. The tabernacle was temporary, just like our earthly bodies. In the Resurrection, God will give us lasting, eternal bodies.

2 Cor 5:2 (NIV). “*Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling.*” Paul longed to receive his resurrected body, to be free of his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7). Whether it was from a tooth ache, unclean water and food, or myriad other ailments, physical pain was a regular problem for most people in the ancient world. Paul’s clothing motif continues through the next several verses. He refers to the sacred vestments of the Aaronic priesthood worn in the temple after a priest’s washings and anointing and before their sacrificial work at the altar.¹³ Paul connects priestly clothes with God’s clothing the Saints with resurrected bodies.

2 Cor 5:3–4. “*being clothed we shall not be found naked . . . but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*” The implication is that Paul shrank at being deprived of embodiment of any sort (physical or spiritual). God covered Adam and Eve’s nakedness with both a physical and a spiritual covering through Christ’s Atonement. Adding more significance to their clothing, in the Hebrew Old Testament *kaphar*, “atonement,” means “to cover over, pacify, make propitiation.”¹⁴ The Lord’s Atonement allows repentant sons and daughters of Adam and Eve to be clothed in God’s robes. Isaiah referred to them as “garments of salvation” and a “robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10). The ancient meaning behind the *atonement* is found in Nephi’s psalm: “O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies!”¹⁵

Paul referred to our physical bodies as an occasional burden (we “sigh with anxiety”; RSV), but that does not mean he wanted anyone to be without a body. (Before the Resurrection, the spirits of the dead long for their bodies.) Rather, Paul looked forward to the day when all will be further clothed with heavenly, resurrected bodies.

2 Cor 5:5 (NIV). “*Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*” God planned the glorious Resurrection before mortality began. Our assurance of this is His “pledge” (BSB) of the Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit of Promise.¹⁶ God promised that those who keep their covenants will receive anointings and sealings through the Holy Spirit of Promise, or the “earnest of the Spirit” (2 Cor 5:5).

2 Cor 5:6 (Anchor Bible). “*knowing that while we are at home in the body we are away from our home with the Lord.*” Paul parallels the phrase “in the body” with “in the tent.” This allusion to the tabernacle is consistent with 1 Cor 6:19, which equates pure bodies and minds with temples that house God’s Spirit.

The next phrase in Greek is often translated simply “away from the Lord,” but that loses its antithetical meaning “‘to leave one’s own country,’ or ‘to go on a long journey.’”¹⁷ The Restoration alone teaches of a premortal life as described in Abr 3:22–23 and D&C 138:55.¹⁸ Paul hinted that we have another home

with the Lord that we are away from while on earth. Paul regularly affirms that he did not lose heart or get discouraged by the challenges of life; “we are always of good courage” (ESV) or “confident” (KJV) that this is part of God’s plan while we are away from our heavenly home.

We walk by faith—2 Cor 5:7–10

2 Cor 5:7. *“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”* Paul referred to the importance of faith in all fourteen canonized epistles accredited to him. The book of Hebrews has perhaps the best section on faith in the New Testament (Heb 11). Faith has a powerful representation in all four standard works. God designed earth life to require faith—that is, relying on our spiritual sense—not only our five physical senses.

2 Cor 5:8 (NIV). *“We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”* After the parenthetical of verse 7, Paul returned to his idea of being confident, or of good courage, knowing that in a short time he would lose his physical body to return to God’s heavenly home.

2 Cor 5:9. *“we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.”* Paul believes that his work will not change whether he is with God or working long distance for Him on earth. Paul’s aim is to please God on whichever side of the veil he works.

2 Cor 5:10 (BSB). *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive his due for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.”* Judgment Day will come for all of us. All our actions and mortal desires will be accounted for before Christ, our Judge. Joseph Smith mentioned this verse while discussing baptisms for the dead in Nauvoo:

He [Jesus] holds the reins of judgment in his hands; he is a wise Lawgiver, and will judge all men, not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men, but “according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil,” or whether these deeds were done in England, America, Spain, Turkey, or India. He will judge them, “not according to what they have not, but according to what they have,” those who have lived without law, will be judged without law, and those who have a law, will be judged by that law. We need not doubt the wisdom and intelligence of the Great Jehovah.¹⁹

Message of Reconciliation—2 Cor 5:11–21

2 Cor 5:11 (CEV). *“We know what it means to respect the Lord, and we encourage everyone to turn to him. God himself knows what we are like.”* The CEV is not a literal translation, but it speaks of respect rather than the KJV’s “terror of the Lord.” Most other English translations use “fear of the Lord.” This is not a slavish fear but the motivation to take responsibility and prepare for the Judgment Day. This licensed Paul to preach it boldly. He (and possibly other missionaries included in “we”) acted as if he stood before God each day. In a sense, each time disciples kneel in prayer and partake of the sacrament is a judgment day and requires a transparent, repentant heart.

2 Cor 5:12–13 (NIV). “We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but . . . so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are ‘out of our mind,’ as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.” Some of Paul’s critics thought he was beside himself, or had gone crazy, with zeal for the work. But Paul assures them that his zealous efforts are motivated by God. The critics “glory in appearance” (KJV) and were not living in fear of the judgment. Other translations describe Paul “being reasonable” (JB), “of sound mind” (NAS), “sober” (KJV). But the JST completely changed verse 13.

2 Cor 5:13 (JST). “For ~~whether we bear record that we be are not beside ourselves; for whether we glory, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your~~ **cause** ~~sakes.~~” Paul defends himself; he is not crazy but is driven by the Lord’s work and for the Saints’ welfare.

2 Cor 5:14 (NIV). “Christ’s love compels us.” Christ’s love may be the controlling factor in Paul’s motivation, but it is not necessarily as strong as some translations, like the ESV and KJV, suggest. This thought came from theologians like Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and John Calvin (1509–1564) who misunderstood predestination and foreordination.²⁰ The Restoration clarified the importance of agency.²¹

2 Cor 5:14–15 (NIV). “we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died . . . and was raised again.” Paul used the hope of the Resurrection as incentive for mortals to live by. Because Jesus died and was resurrected, we as Christians now live a Christ-centered life—not a worldly self-centered existence. Christ’s disciples are to “walk in newness of life,” or with the hope of the Resurrection (Rom 6:4).

2 Cor 5:16 (JST). “Wherefore henceforth ~~know we no man live we no more after the flesh; yea, though we once lived after the flesh, yet since we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth~~ **know we him live we no more after the flesh.**” When we live after the flesh, we value materialism and things of the world. Paul and many others expected a conquering Messiah to come soon, and the Jews misunderstood who Jesus of Nazareth really was. Not until disciples understood the Christian viewpoint of the gospel did they understand who Jesus was. That knowledge came not after the flesh, or “from a human point of view” (RSV), but from divine inspiration, or the spirit of revelation (D&C 8:2–3).

2 Cor 5:17. “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Christ brought an entirely new view and meaning to life. Materialistic and selfish values have no part of His new creation. Jesus tried to explain this rebirth to Nicodemus: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5).

2 Cor 5:18–19. “all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation . . . in Christ, reconciling the world.” These two verses contain four forms of the word *katallagé*, “reconcile, restoration to favor, adjustment of a difference, restore.” This is the same Greek word translated as “atonement” in Rom 5:11. Heavenly Father reconciled His plan through Jesus of Nazareth in order to satisfy the demands of justice. Our

Savior's atoning sacrifice has reconciled us to God the Father. Our sins need not hold us back any longer (Rom 5:10; Col 1:20).

2 Cor 5:20 (NIV). *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."* "We" probably refers to the Apostles or missionaries, as "ambassadors for Christ." They announce their King's amnesty, and their message is from God Himself—who calls all to beseech Him and become reconciled through repentance and forgiveness.

2 Cor 5:21 (BLB). *"He made the One not having known sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."* The second instance of "sin" may have referred to the sin offering in a temple setting (Rom 8:3; Isa 53:10). The sacrificial idiom speaks of the Atonement of Christ for the sins of humankind (as the book of Hebrews elaborates). Christ was sinless but carried our sins.

2 Corinthians 6

Apostolic entreaty—2 Cor 6:1–13

2 Cor 6:1 (NIV). *"As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain."*

Across his epistles, Paul identifies himself as the Lord's Apostle, ambassador, servant, and now, fellow worker.²² He repeats his authority, pleading with the Corinthian Saints to not abandon their faith. Since 1 Cor 3:1, Paul has addressed his authority, and over the next ten verses he wraps up his long defense.

2 Cor 6:2 (ISV). *"At the right time I heard you, and on a day of salvation I helped you." Listen, now is really the 'right time'! Now is the 'day of salvation'!*" Paul quotes Isa 49:8 and then gives an interpretation of the ancient text. Similarly, we live at the "right time" when the Lord's gospel is available and He needs servants to gather Israel. In addition, all baptized members today have signed up for this service.

2 Cor 6:4–5 (NIV). *"as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles."* In God's service, Paul patiently endured many forms of suffering—nine of which are mentioned, organized into three sets of three:

- General suffering: afflictions (or "troubles," NIV), necessities (or "hardships," NIV), and distresses (or "calamities," NCB)
- Suffering endured at the hands of men: stripes (or "beatings," BSB), imprisonment, and tumults (or "riots," NIV)
- Suffering by self-discipline: labors ("demanding work," NIV), watching (or "sleeplessness," NASB), and fasting.

2 Cor 6:6–7. *"By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God."* Paul's second list of nine

includes qualities that all disciples can cultivate to better serve God. The NIV translators communicated the second and third traits as “understanding” and “patience.” These virtues are also listed as gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:8–10). Interestingly, Paul includes the Holy Spirit, which is usually a source of all the other virtues.

2 Cor 6:7. *“by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.”* The final virtue uses military imagery. Soldiers fought with their right hand to attack while their left hand held their shield.

2 Cor 6:8–10. *“By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report . . . as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”* Paul’s next list of nine includes pairs describing the antithesis of apostolic service: honor and dishonor, good and evil report, truth and deceivers, known and unknown, living and dying, chastened though not killed, sorrow and rejoicing, poor and rich, possessing nothing yet knowing all things. These opposites may refer to the same experience but are interpreted through either an earthly or eternal lens. Life includes lots of irony. For example, the gospel message was interpreted by some as an evil report but by believers as the opposite. Those who are financially destitute but have an active testimony of the Savior and serve Him will possess God’s riches eternally.

2 Cor 6:11–13 (BSB). *“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians. Our hearts are open wide. It is not our affection, but yours, that is restrained. As a fair exchange, I ask you as my children: Open wide your hearts also.”* Paul wrote with a sincere heart and asked the Saints to receive and reciprocate his love. If there was any reticence, it was on their part. Paul asked the Saints to enlarge their hearts. The KJV referred to the bowels as the center of emotion, kindness, and pity—what we would describe in modern terms as the heart.

Being an example—2 Cor 6:14–18

2 Cor 6:14. *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”* The next four verses briefly interrupt Paul’s train of thought that calls for segregation or separation. They may refer specifically to unmarried people seeking a spouse, but without more context, we cannot know. Most biblical scholars agree these four verses are disruptive.²³ They may have been cut and pasted from another letter or may not be Pauline. Eight words are never used elsewhere in the New Testament, and the content contradicts Paul’s earlier advice to the Corinthians for couples to work out marriage differences if possible and remain together to bless unbelieving spouses and keep children holy (1 Cor 7:10–14).

2 Cor 6:15 (NIV). *“What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?”* *Belial* in Hebrew is the word for perdition or worthlessness, an enemy of God. It was sometimes used to refer to wickedness. It calls for the Corinthians to cut ties with idolatrous associations. Yet, the idea of elitism that underlies these interruptive four verses is confusing because Paul and Jesus repeatedly denounced such prejudices earlier.²⁴

2 Cor 6:16. *“what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?”* Earlier Paul discussed the ideal of disciples’ bodies housing the Spirit of God (1 Cor 6:19). Jesus also called Himself the temple

(Jn 2:19). The three Old Testament citations that follow defend this idea, and show the author's scriptural knowledge.

2 Cor 6:16 (BSB). *“I will dwell with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people.”* This cites Old Testament covenant relationships from Lev 26:12, Jer 32:38, and Ezk 37:27.

2 Cor 6:17 (BSB). *“There fore come out from among them and be separate, say the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.”* We can find similar messages in Isa 52:11 and Ezk 20:34.

2 Cor 6:18 (BSB). *“I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”* Although not a clear match, the first line of this quotation is found in 2 Sam 7:14. Nowhere in Paul's writings except here do we find the phrase “sons and daughters.” Still, the fatherhood of God was well established in Christianity by Jesus. Even though this section contradictorily denounces joining with pagans it is found in all the early Greek manuscripts of the epistle. So either it was added very early on or it was a digression possibly dealing with a specific issue among the Corinthians.

As always, whenever we find confusing passages of scripture in the Epistles, it is wise to compare them with the Lord's teachings, restored scripture, and statements from living prophets. The prophet Joseph Smith taught that not everything in the Bible is accurate in its current form (Articles of Faith 1:8). This passage may fall into that category.

Notes

1 “Apostolos,” *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/652.htm>.

2 Php 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Ths 1:1; 2 Ths 1:1; Phm 1:1.

3 Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; Gal 1:3; Php 1:2; and Phm 1:3 are all considered genuinely Pauline by textual biblical scholars. We see similar greetings attributed to Paul in Eph 1:2, Col 1:2, 2 Th 1:2. The authentic Pauline Epistles share vocabulary, style, phrases, and themes. The other letters that receive his name still may have originated with him, but there is less evidence of continuity. However, John L. Hilton's stylometry showed all the Pauline corpus sharing statistical validity except the book of Ephesians. Unpublished stylometry study in possession of author.

4 Eph 1:16; Jerry A. Wilson, “Holy Spirit,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 2:651–652. “The Holy Spirit of Promise . . . refers to a specific function of the Holy Ghost. . . . [It] is the power by which ordinances and other righteous acts performed on this earth . . . are ratified, validated, and sealed in heaven. . . . The ultimate manifestation of the Holy Spirit of Promise is in connection with having one's Calling and Election made sure—that is, receiving ‘the more sure word of prophecy’ testifying that an individual is sealed up to Eternal Life (D&C 131:5). The Holy Spirit of Promise validates this blessing or seals it upon the person.”

- 5 D&C 132:7, 19–20, 26; Joseph Smith spoke on this topic many times, as found in the Joseph Smith Papers. For example, “Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 4 August 1839–C, as Reported by Willard Richards,” p. 79, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-4-august-1839-c-as-reported-by-willard-richards/5>.
- 6 Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1958), 361.
- 7 Jose Maria Casciaro, ed., *The Letters of Saint Paul* (New York, NY: Scepter, 2000), 295.
- 8 Bruce C. Hafen, “A Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit,” October 2007 general conference, online at [church ofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org).
- 9 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2007), 134.
- 10 “*Kaluptó*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/2572.htm>.
- 11 Jn 12:31; for more examples see Jn 14:30; 16:11; 1 Jn 5:19; and from the Pauline school, Eph 6:12.
- 12 See, for example, Rom 9:1; 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Tim 1:14.
- 13 Ex 28–29; Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1992), 91–111.
- 14 In Greek, the word for “atonement,” *katallagé*, meant “reconciliation, restoration to favor.”
- 15 2 Ne 4:33; Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1989), 558–559. “In Semitic languages, where one root can have many meanings, the first rule is always to look for the basic or literal meaning of the word, which in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic usually takes us back to early days and simple homely affairs of life in the desert or the countryside. . . . It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out, ‘*Ana dakhiluka*,’ meaning ‘I am thy suppliant,’ whereupon the Lord would place the hem of his robe over the guest’s shoulder and declare him under his protection. . . . This puts him under the Lord’s protection from all enemies. They embrace in a close hug, as Arab chiefs still do; the Lord makes a place for him and invites him to sit down beside him—they are at-one (2 Nephi 4:33; Alma 5:24).”
- 16 See D&C 76:53; 88:3; 124:124; 132:7, 18, 19, 26; Eph 1:13–14.
- 17 Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 272.
- 18 See also D&C 93:23, 29.
- 19 “Times and Seasons, 15 April 1842,” p. 759, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-april-1842/9>.
- 20 The reformer John Calvin, a French theologian and minister who heavily impacted Protestant thought, wrote, “We call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he determined within himself what he willed to become of each man. . . . Eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has

been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.” Victor I. Ezigbo, *Introducing Christian Theologies*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth, 2016), 68.

21 See, for example, Abr 3:22–23; 2 Ne 2:15–16, 27; Alm 13:3.

22 Rom 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 5:20; 6:1 (the JST, like the BSB and others, clarifies that “him” refers to Jesus).

23 Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 368.

24 See, for example Jn 4; Act 10:34; 1 Cor 9:20.