



Table 1. Outline of 2 Corinthians 7–13

<b>2 Cor 7–9: Saints’ need to repent</b>	
7:1–3	Paul continues to warn against idolatry and calls for a cleansing
7:4–7	Paul joys over Titus’s news of the Saints’ repentance
7:8–13	Godly sorrow motivates repentance
8:1–9	Be generous in offerings for the poor
8:10–15	Guidance on giving
8:16–9:5	Paul’s commendation of his delegates to the Corinthians
9:6–15	Blessings come from giving
<b>2 Cor 10–12: Repent of evil speaking against the Lord’s servants</b>	
10:1–11	Paul’s reply to accusations of weakness and overbearing nature
10:12–18	Paul’s reply to complaints against his aversion to ambition
11:1–20	Paul defends himself through “fool’s speech”
11:21–33	Paul’s list of sufferings as an Apostle
12:1–10	Vision of the third heaven
12:11–21	Paul’s concern for the Corinthian church
<b>2 Cor 13:1–10: Concluding admonition</b>	
13:11–14	Final exhortation, greeting, and benediction

**God.**” This verse belongs with the last few verses of chapter 6, following three Old Testament citations promising that if the Lord’s people stayed away from idols,

- He would receive the Saints,
- He would become as a Father to them, and
- believers would become His sons and daughters.

These promises extend into our dispensation. We must constantly repent by cleansing our thoughts, words, and actions from everything unholy. As the Spirit cannot dwell in unholy places, we must quickly repent to receive the companionship of the Spirit. In the KJV, “filthiness” comes from the Greek word *molusmos*, which also means “staining, defilement, pollution.” In the last phrase, “perfecting” (*epiteleio*) means “to bring to an end, accomplish, perfect, execute, complete.”

**2 Cor 7:2–3.** “*Receive us; we have wronged no man . . . ye are in our hearts to die and live with you.*” Paul defends himself against misrepresentations. Repeatedly he defends his apostolic

authority (and he continues to do so in the next six chapters). Yet following his correction, he reassures his audience of the love he has for them. The Lord taught this pattern to the Prophet Joseph as well: “Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov’d, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy” (D&C 121:43).

### *Paul rejoices over news of the Saints’ repentance—2 Cor 7:4–16*

**2 Cor 7:4 (BSB).** “**Great is my confidence in you; great is my pride in you; I am filled with encouragement; in all our troubles my joy overflows.**” Paul transitions to a new theme on the joy of repentance. Just as in 2 Cor 1:14; 5:12; and 6:11, Paul cannot say enough about the Corinthians’ humility to repent.

**2 Cor 7:5–6.** “**When we were come . . . we were troubled on every side. . . . Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down.**” In addition to recounting the troubles associated with traveling from Ephesus through Macedonia (northern Greece), Paul retells the Saints that he was deeply worried about them. He was probably concerned with how they would receive his scolding letter and wondered whether they would repent or reject him.

**2 Cor 7:7 (NIV).** “**and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him . . . your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.**” The Lord comforted Paul by sending Titus with a letter from Corinth. Paul was overjoyed to hear the news that the Corinthians softened their hearts to accept correction.

### *Godly sorrow motivates repentance—2 Cor 7:8–16*

**2 Cor 7:9 (BSB).** “**I rejoice, not because you were made sorrowful, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you felt the sorrow that God had intended.**” Paul’s previous letter to the Corinthians (we can only assume it is what we call 1 Corinthians—Paul wrote the Corinthians more letters than those we have today) was written not to inflict pain but to motivate the Saints to repent. It caused both Paul and the Saints temporary grief. The positive outcome was worth the temporary remorse. Spencer W. Kimball explained that godly sorrow does not tear one down but motivates change to build one up. “Repentance of the godly type means that one comes to recognize the sin, and voluntarily, and without pressure from outside sources begins his transformation. If one is sorry only because someone found out about his sin, his repentance is not complete. Godly sorrow causes one to want to repent.”<sup>1</sup> Repentance changes the heart to apply Christ’s Atonement and brings one closer to feel His love. It transforms sinners into better people and good people into disciples of Christ.

**2 Cor 7:10 (NIV).** “**Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.**” Christ’s teachings on repentance allow guilt or shame to turn into hope in Christ and joy in God’s plan of redemption. Russell M. Nelson spoke of repentance as a process that we all need. He asked,

“Does *everyone* need to repent?” The answer is yes. Too many people consider repentance as punishment—something to be avoided except in the most serious circumstances. But this feeling of being penalized is engendered by Satan. He tries to block us from looking to Jesus Christ, who stands with open arms, hoping and willing to heal, forgive, cleanse, strengthen, purify, and sanctify us.<sup>2</sup>

He explained that daily repentance allows the Savior to transform us into the best version of ourselves. With this outcome, repentance is the highest form of self-love.

**2 Cor 7:11 (NIV).** “*See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.*” The Corinthian Saints received Paul’s apostolic call and repented. The KJV implies that Paul was encouraging revenge, but I prefer other translations, like the following: “see justice done” (NIV), “punishment” (ESV), “vindication” (BLB).

**2 Cor 7:12 (YLT).** “*I also wrote to you . . . for our diligence in your behalf being manifested unto you before God.*” Paul wrote from the depths of his love for the Saints to encourage them to repent. In other translations, this verse describes their repentance as cooperation—which God will reward.

**2 Cor 7:13 (NIV).** “*we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you.*” Paul and Titus both joy in the Corinthians’ changes and happiness.

**2 Cor 7:14–15 (BSB).** “*I was not embarrassed by anything I had boasted to him about you. But just as everything we said to you was true. . . . And his affection for you is even greater . . . as you welcomed him with fear and trembling.*” All the good things Paul told Titus about the Corinthians were proven true. Titus was especially impressed by the Corinthians’ humility to submit to God. The phrase “fear and trembling” is repeated three times in the Old Testament, once in Mk 5:33, and five times in Paul’s other epistles.<sup>3</sup>

**2 Cor 7:16 (NIV).** “*I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.*” Paul opens and closes this section with repentance. He is confident that the people can continue to choose the right.

## **2 Corinthians 8—Collection of Financial Offerings**

Several months before in a previous letter, Paul asked the Corinthian Saints to gather offerings for the poor (1 Cor 16:1–4). He returns to this subject with delicacy and tact. This topic is one of the major purposes of his letter. He wanted their contributions to be generous, voluntary, and prepared in advance.

*Be generous in offerings for the poor—2 Cor 8:1–9*

**2 Cor 8:1 (NIV).** “*And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.*” I chose to highlight the NIV here because it clarifies

that Paul asked both men and women for donations. He changes subjects with one of his favorite transition words, *dé*, translated “now” (BSB) or “moreover” (KJV). Their grace (*charis*) is “a gift” (RSV) and is translated as “a favor, gratitude, thanks, kindness” or the divine “gift or blessing brought to man by Jesus Christ,” as in 2 Corinthians 8:6.<sup>4</sup>

Once he has expressed his appreciation for their improved relationship, Paul returns to the matter at hand: collecting offerings for the poor and the Jerusalem church. He deliberately refers to the example of their neighboring Macedonian Saints (in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea), where he was when Titus met him with the letter.

**2 Cor 8:2 (NIV).** “*In the midst of a very severe trial, . . . their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.*” Paul honors the Macedonian Saints for their generosity despite their poverty. He contrasts their financial need with the Corinthians’ wealth to encourage more liberal offerings.

**2 Cor 8:3 (NIV).** “*I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own . . .*” The key is voluntary generosity, or being “willing of themselves” (KJV). Even in a time of want, they sacrificed to help others. In Act 2:44 and 4:32, we saw the Saints living a similar principle. God restored it in Kirtland, Ohio as the law of consecration.<sup>5</sup> After Jesus’s visit to the Nephites, the people also “had all things common among them; therefore, there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” (4 Ne 1:3). The Lord’s law of Zion, or the celestial law, ensures that there are “no poor among them” (Moses 7:18).

Consecration is based on three points—voluntary agency, stewardship, and accountability to God—the first of which is included in this verse. Scholar Steven C. Harper explained that when disciples become “empowered with correct knowledge of the law, we are free agents—accountable stewards of the Lord’s possessions, including ourselves. . . . Consecration is more than the act of giving. It is the sanctification that comes of giving willingly, for the right reasons.”<sup>6</sup>

**2 Cor 8:5 (NIV).** “*they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.*” The Saints’ generosity stemmed from their theology. First, the poor Saints gave their hearts to the Lord and then donated their means.

**2 Cor 8:6 (BSB).** “*So we urged Titus to help complete your act of grace, just as he had started it.*” Previously Paul called Titus to collect a donation from Corinthian Saints for the poor of the Jerusalem church (as Paul did in Macedonia). Paul emphasizes the liberality of the northern Saints as an example.

**2 Cor 8:8 (NIV).** “*I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.*” As the Corinthian Saints were known for their gifts of faith, speech, knowledge, and love, Paul now asks them to live up to their reputation by donating substantial offerings.

**2 Cor 8:9 (BLB).** “*Jesus Christ . . . became poor, so that you through His poverty might be enriched.*” The doctrine of sacrifice underlines the Lord’s law of giving voluntary offerings. Paul

reminded his audience of Jesus's premortal example when He left His divine position to become a lowly builder to build the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus gave "His spiritual riches to raise mankind of his spiritual poverty."<sup>7</sup>

### *Guidelines on giving—2 Cor 8:10–15*

**2 Cor 8:10–11 (NIV).** *"Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work . . . according to your means."* Six to nine months previously, Paul asked the Saints to gather money for the poor (1 Cor 16:1–4).

**2 Cor 8:12 (BSB).** *"if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has."* We must give willingly, according to our funds. Jesus also taught this by honoring the widow's donation of two mites (Lk 21:2). The principle of sharing with the poor was repeated in the Old Testament regularly.<sup>8</sup>

**2 Cor 8:13 (NIV).** *"Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality."* Paul answers a hypothetical question: "Why are we burdened so that someone else can have it easy?" The Lord's law of consecration encourages everyone to work and share. Generosity and sacrifice help address financial inequality and teach us to value God's way above greed.

**2 Cor 8:14 (NIV).** *"your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality."* The Corinthians may have questioned whether the Jerusalem Saints would repay the other churches. Paul's focus was not repayment but the blessings from giving a real sacrifice. Paul cites Ex 16:18, "each according to his need," to connect their gathering with gathering manna.

### *Paul's commendation of his delegates to the Corinthians—2 Cor 8:16–9:5*

**2 Cor 8:16–17 (NKJV).** *"thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord."* Titus and an unnamed brother from Macedonia volunteered to go back to Corinth to collect the donations for the poor in Jerusalem before Paul arrived.

**2 Cor 8:20–21 (BSB).** *"We hope to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this generous gift. For we are taking great care to do what is right."* Paul wanted nothing about this collection to be suspect. Honesty in the Lord's sight and in the sight of men was practiced. Tithe and offering donations are sacred.

**2 Cor 8:22–23 (NIV).** *"In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous . . . they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ."* This other unnamed man was known by the Corinthians and trusted by them and Paul.

**2 Cor 8:24 (NLT).** *“So show them your love, and prove to all the churches that our boasting about you is justified.”* Paul had boasted to others of the Corinthians’ generosity as proof that they were true Saints.

## **2 Corinthians 9—Blessings Come from Giving**

**2 Cor 9:5.** *“I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.”* Paul asks the Saints to follow through on their promised donations. He knew that offerings are not about money but are about faith. It is a principle of obedience, not finance.

### *Blessings come from giving—2 Cor 9:6–15*

**2 Cor 9:6 (NKJV).** *“He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”* Paul uses agricultural images and the law of the harvest to encourage the Saints to give a bountiful harvest of offerings. He teaches that the law of the harvest works for more than just agriculture. When we give away all that we are to build the Lord’s kingdom, God will bless us.

**2 Cor 9:7.** *“for God loveth a cheerful giver.”* Paul coined a phrase, but the idea stemmed from several Old Testament passages.<sup>9</sup> God’s request for voluntary offerings goes beyond money and includes one’s attitude and love. It is better to not give than to give with a bad attitude. The Lord built on these ideas in D&C 58:26: “It is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.” God will reward those who have pure desires, as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7).

**2 Cor 9:8 (NIV).** *“God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”* As further evidence to trust God, Paul cites Ps 112:9. King Benjamin also taught, “If ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you” (Mosi 2:22).

**2 Cor 9:10 (BSB).** *“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your store of seed and will increase the harvest of your righteousness.”* Just as the monetary collection was to supply those in need, our divine Gardener will bless those who generously give. Those gifts may be spiritual fruits—which are of greater value than monetary gifts. As Christians, we must see to the physical and spiritual needs of those around us. Paul looks forward to the abundance of spiritual gifts that will be poured out on the Saints who donate generously to the poor.

**2 Cor 9:15 (NIV).** *“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”* All the gifts mortals can give pale in comparison with our Savior’s gift of immortality and eternal life. This should motivate generosity on our part.

## **2 Corinthians 10—Repent of Evil Speaking against the Lord’s Servants**

2 Corinthians 10 changes tone drastically (some scholars even speculate that it was a different letter).<sup>10</sup> Paul calls on the Saints to obey and scolds some for speaking evil of their leaders (particularly of him). By reading between the lines, we see that in this chapter Paul seems to reply to accusations made against him. In the first half, he replies to accusations against his weakness and overbearing actions and, later, to claims of his aversion to ambition. He addresses these by once again defending his apostolic authority.

*Paul’s reply to accusations of his weakness and overbearing nature—2 Cor 10:1–11*

**2 Cor 10:1 (NIV).** “*By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am ‘timid’ when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ toward you when away!*” Paul opens by asserting that he follows the “humble and gentle” example of Jesus (CEV). This is used as evidence to support his authority as an Apostle and to speak for and witness of the Lord. It is also a good example for all disciples to begin each precarious discussion with “the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (KJV). As an aside, in Jewish wisdom literature, “the truly wise man is always ‘gentle.’”<sup>11</sup> The NIV translation added quotation marks to suggest that Paul cites the negative feedback he received from some Church members in Corinth. In verse 2, Paul threatens to become bold in person if they do not make the necessary changes.

**2 Cor 10:3–5 (BSB).** “*though we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh. . . . they have divine power to demolish strongholds . . . and every presumption set up against the knowledge of God.*” In verses 3–5, Paul detours to compare worldly and spiritual powers and weapons. Paul alludes to worldliness as the flesh. Previously he asked Saints who live in the world not to live by the world’s standards (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 7:31). Christians fight against Satan—sin and the ways of the world—with the power of divine gifts. Paul presents himself as fighting for Christ in the battle against darkness.

**2 Cor 10:6 (BSB).** “*we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, as soon as your obedience is complete.*” It appears the Corinthians still had need to repent since Paul rebukes the disobedient Saints and calls for obedience. This may have been directed to a particular person or group of offenders that Titus privately mentioned (see 1 Cor 12:21; 13:2).

**2 Cor 10:7–9 (BSB).** “*You are looking at outward appearances. . . . For even if I boast somewhat excessively about the authority the Lord gave us . . . I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you by my letters.*” Paul backs up his call for obedience with another appeal to his apostolic authority (which he also does in 1 Cor 9:1–2; 2 Cor 3:1–13). He wrote boldly and threatened to use boldness when he arrived.

*Paul’s reply to complaints against his aversion to ambition—2 Cor 10:12–18*

**2 Cor 10:12 (NIV).** “*We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves.*” Paul speaks sarcastically by contrasting himself with his prideful attackers: “They



measure themselves by themselves.” We assume that some members denounced him and felt they were more qualified. Paul denounces vying for status, which pervaded the Greco-Roman world’s competitive network.

**2 Cor 10:14–15 (BSB).** “*We are not overstepping our bounds. . . . Neither do we boast beyond our limits in the labors of others.*” Related to apostolic authority, Paul moves on to a problem with apostolic jurisdiction.<sup>12</sup> Because we have only one side of the conversation, we must assume that Paul passionately addresses his love for and responsibility over the Corinthian Saints because some were contending about leadership. Paul claimed fatherhood of that area because he opened missionary work there over four years prior.

**2 Cor 10:17–18 (BSB).** “*Rather, ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*” Rather than arguing with his opponents about who presided over Achaia, Paul cites Jer 9:24. The Lord blesses mortals’ weaknesses and strengths with His divine mantle to accomplish His work. Paul knew that missionary work is run by the Lord. (Similarly, see the speech by another great missionary, Ammon, in Alm 26:11, 35–36).

## **2 Corinthians 11—Paul Defends Himself through “Fool’s Speech”**

For the first half of this chapter, Paul introduced his argument as “a fool’s speech” (2 Cor 11:1; 12:13). He adopted his critics’ tactics by boasting in his own defense. Although he was self-conscious about boasting, he listed his credentials and then explained his rationale behind not accepting financial support as a Church leader (2 Cor 11:5–15). He continued to defend himself by enumerating the sacrifices he made as a missionary (2 Cor 11:16–33).

*Paul symbolically describes the Saints as betrothed to Christ—2 Cor 11:1–4*

**2 Cor 11:1 (NIV).** “*I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness.*” Paul asks his readers to indulge him in a little foolishness, or “folly” (KJV), because he is going to brag. He calls it foolishness since he has just denounced his enemies who use it against him. They undermined Paul by parading their credentials and by faultfinding. Now Paul admits that he, by necessity, must parade his credentials as an Apostle to silence them. This lasts for twenty-one verses.

**2 Cor 11:2.** “*I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*” Paul figuratively arranged the marriage between the Saints and God. Throughout the Bible, marriage imagery is often used to symbolize God’s covenant with His people.<sup>13</sup> Betrothal was the first step in Jewish marriage.<sup>14</sup> At the time of the New Testament, marriages were arranged by the father or guardian; but Paul was the matchmaker for the converts’ covenant with the Lord, their groom.<sup>15</sup>

**2 Cor 11:3 (NIV).** *“just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”* Paul does not want his young converts to be deceived as Eve was by Satan.

**2 Cor 11:4 (BSB).** *“if someone comes and proclaims a Jesus other than the One we proclaimed, . . . you put up with it way too easily.”* It sounds as if an unnamed false teacher had manipulated the gospel. The usurper or counterfeit had a different spirit that was not from God. In other words, Paul ironically asks, “If you can put up with a fake teacher, why can’t you put up with the apostle who taught you in the first place where you felt the Spirit of God witness of its truth?” The Spirit is a major theme for Paul.

*Paul asks readers to indulge his foolish boasting—2 Cor 11:5–20*

**2 Cor 11:5 (NIV).** *“I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘super-apostles.’”* Paul asks the Saints to bear with him as he is as much an Apostle as the others who knew Jesus personally, or perhaps he is referring specifically to Peter and John as “the very chiefest apostles” (KJV). In Gal 1:12, Paul refers to Peter, James (the brother of the Lord), and John as the pillars of the Church. Yet, he calls himself the least of the Apostles in 2 Cor 12:11. Whether least or greatest, all Apostles are special witnesses. Paul received his commission from Christ just as the other Apostles had.

**2 Cor 11:6 (BSB).** *“Although I am not a polished speaker, I am certainly not lacking in knowledge. We have made this clear to you in every way possible.”* Given the biographical information on Paul in his letters (including the prominence of his hometown, Tarsus, as an intellectual center; his education under Gamaliel; the letters he wrote, especially the chiasmic poetry of Philemon; and his speaking circuit on Mars Hill),<sup>16</sup> I do not think Paul was an uneducated, mediocre speaker. The KJV “rude,” is also translated “an amateur” (AB, GNT), “unpolished” (BLB), or “unskilled” (NCB, NET)—contrasting Paul to the elegant philosophical orators of the day. The Socratic and Sophist traditions raised up some of the greatest speakers in the history of the world. Paul never pretended to be on par with them in his second or third tongue.<sup>17</sup> Yet, from the evidence in the New Testament, we see that he was a powerful public speaker. Paul admits that in knowledge he was skilled and taught the Saints truth.

**2 Cor 11:7 (NIV).** *“Was it a sin for me . . . by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge?”* Paul returns to the fact that he did not receive any wages from the Corinthians for preaching. It seems as though some churches in Macedonia contributed to his missionary expenses, which made some Corinthians upset and jealous.

**2 Cor 11:9 (NIV).** *“I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.”* In addition to receiving funds from the Macedonians, Paul supported himself financially as a leatherworker or tentmaker in Corinth (see Act 18:3). Paul established a protocol for Church leaders to support themselves the best they could and at times to receive voluntary aid. Paul was proud of the fact that he was not paid for preaching and even boasts of the fact.

**2 Cor 11:11 (NIV).** “*Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!*” The underlying motivation for Paul’s missionary work was love for the people. Even though Paul had been misunderstood by his enemies, he knew that God knew his heart.

**2 Cor 11:12–14 (BSB).** “*I will keep on doing what I am doing, in order to undercut . . . false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And . . . Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*” These wicked teachers have “disguised” (RSV, JB) themselves to appear good, just as Satan can appear as an angel of light. This idea was known in a pseudepigraphic book from this time, *Life of Adam and Eve*, which describes Satan appearing to Eve “wearing the form of brightness of an angel.”<sup>18</sup>

**2 Cor 11:16 (NIV).** “*I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting.*” Paul summarizes the purpose of his prologue in this section. He only boasts “as a fool” to confront his critics. He’s trying to say that boasting is never a godly habit but is always foolishness.

**2 Cor 11:20 (BSB).** “*In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or exalts himself.*” It sounds as if the Corinthian Saints received intruding men as their leaders who put on airs, bad-mouthed Paul, and lived off the Saints’ donations. Paul asked this group of murmurers whether they want him to glory in his accomplishment, too, in order to be believed.

#### *Paul’s list of sufferings as an Apostle—2 Cor 11:21–33*

**2 Cor 11:21–23 (BSB).** “*I can match what anyone else dares to boast about. . . . Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. . . . Are they servants of Christ? I am speaking like I am out of my mind, but I am so much more: in harder labor, in more imprisonments.*” Paul addresses the attacks made against him one at a time with his own version of boasting. It seems likely that Paul’s rival made a claim about his enduring hardships. This argument was known at the time among Cynic and Stoic authors.

**2 Cor 11:24.** “*Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.*” Paul enumerates the abuse he had recently endured as a missionary. He mentions being whipped on five occasions. In Deu 25:1–3, Moses set a limit on how many lashes a guilty man could receive: “No more than forty lashes.” Jewish rabbis reduced that number to thirty-nine in case of a miscount. They flogged or whipped an offender thirteen times on the chest, thirteen times on the right shoulder, and thirteen times on the left shoulder. During a Jewish scourging, it was common for someone to read Deu 28:58, 59; 24:9; and Ps 78:38–39.<sup>19</sup> As a Roman citizen, could Paul have refused to undergo this whipping? He was protected from Roman torture without being proven guilty, but in the Jewish setting, had he refused, he may have been excommunicated and not been allowed into the synagogues where he often taught.

**2 Cor 11:25.** *“Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep.”* It was common to describe a twenty-four-hour period as “a night and a day.” Paul repeated his autobiographical details elsewhere, but this list is the most inclusive. Luke also discussed many of Paul’s trials in the Acts. The amount of his physical suffering is overwhelming—the Lord did not shield this Apostle from trials. The omniscient Lord prophesied at the time of Paul’s conversion, “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Act 9:16 ESV).

Other Apostles also suffered, and their attitude was equally willing and humble: “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” and “Rejoice that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed at the revelation of His glory” (Act 5:41 BSB; 1 Pet 4:13 BSB). Sacrifice and suffering can produce sanctification if one meekly endures with faith in Christ. The Lord taught the suffering Prophet Joseph Smith that “all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7). If our Savior was made “perfect through sufferings,” then His servants may be asked to suffer as well (Heb 2:10).

**2 Cor 11:28–29 (NIV).** *“Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?”* Paul’s outward struggles pale in comparison to his inward concerns about the Saints. Paul sympathizes in Rom 14:1 NIV, “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling” as he or she may fall away.

**2 Cor 11:30.** *“If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.”* Paul claims his list of persecutions is accurate, with God as his witness. Even though enumerating his perils and privations as part of his apostolic service sounds boastful, Paul feels he must enumerate these things to convince the Corinthians of his commitment to the work.

### *A humiliating memory—2 Cor 11:30–33*

**2 Cor 11:32 (BSB).** *“In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas secured the city of the Damascenes in order to arrest me.”* Luke recorded the same story in Act 9. Aretas IV may have been the governor of the Nabataean Arabs from 9 BC to AD 40. His daughter was married to (and divorced from) Herod Antipas. Other sources question whether Paul meant the Nabataean king himself or an official in control of Damascus.<sup>20</sup> Luke recorded that the Jews laid wait to kill Paul, but Paul claims the king’s forces were involved. Both parties were probably against Paul.

**2 Cor 11:33 (BSB).** *“I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his grasp.”* In Act 9:25, Luke described the disciples lowering Paul in a basket (probably a large, flexible woven container used for transporting bales of hay or wool). The window in the house was presumably built into the wall away from the city gates.

Table 2. Lists of Paul's afflictions in the epistles to the Corinthians

1 Cor 4:9–13	2 Cor 6:4–5	2 Cor 11:23–28
God set forth us the apostles last	afflictions	labours more abundant
appointed to death	necessities	stripes above measure
a spectacle unto the world	distresses	in prisons more frequent
fools for Christ's sake	stripes	in deaths oft
we are weak	imprisonments	five times received I forty stripes save one
we are despised	tumults	thrice was I beaten with rods
we both hunger, and thirst	labours	once was I stoned
and are naked, and are buffeted	watchings	thrice I suffered shipwreck
and have no certain dwelling place	fastings	a night and a day have I been in the deep
labour, working with our hands		journeyings often
being reviled		perils of waters
being persecuted, we suffer it		perils of robbers
being defamed, we entreat		perils by mine own countrymen
we are made as the filth of the world		perils by the heathen
the offscouring of all things		perils in the city
		perils in the wilderness
		perils in the sea
		perils among false brethren
		weariness and painfulness
		watchings often
		hunger and thirst
		fastings often
		cold and nakedness

## 2 Corinthians 12—Visions and Revelations

From reciting the hardships he had endured as a missionary, Paul moves onto sharing a special vision of the degrees of glory. Although he continues to apologize for this type of boasting, he goes ahead in order

to provide evidence to silence his critics. He uses visions and revelations as witnesses of his apostolic calling, or perhaps his critics also had boasted of the same.

### *Vision of the third heaven—2 Cor 12:1–6*

**2 Cor 12:1 (BLB).** “*It behooves me to boast; it is not profitable indeed, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.*” Although Paul refers only to one vision here, we know he received others as recorded in the rest of the New Testament.<sup>21</sup>

**2 Cor 12:2 (DRB).** “*I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago . . . caught up to the third heaven.*” Paul retells this vision indirectly, not identifying himself as the one who received this vision. But the Prophet Joseph Smith identified the man as Paul:

Paul ascended into the third heavens, and he could understand the three principal rounds of Jacob’s ladder—the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms, where Paul saw and heard things which were not lawful for him to utter. I could explain a hundred-fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them.<sup>22</sup>

Joseph Smith also taught that “Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings were in the Church” and wrote from that perspective.<sup>23</sup>

**2 Cor 12:4.** “*and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*” This vision seems to have been received in conjunction with things taught in the temple.

**2 Cor 12:6 (NIV).** “*if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.*” Paul refuses to boast any more of this sacred vision. His goal was not to brag about himself—as a fool would—but to speak the truth in order to set his story straight.

### *Paul’s thorn and God’s grace—2 Cor 12:7–10*

**2 Cor 12:7 (NIV).** “*in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh.*” Paul felt that the Lord kept him humble with a “thorn in the flesh,” or a splinter. We do not know what Paul’s physical challenge was, but he says it was Satan’s way of buffeting him. It may have been a physical, emotional, or spiritual ailment.

**2 Cor 12:8–9 (BSB).** “*Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness.’*” After fervently praying for healing, the Lord taught Paul that he needed to learn meekness and reliance on God. Rather than providing a divine healing, the Lord strengthened Paul to carry out his calling with his weakness. The Lord uses our weaknesses to perfect us. Our weaknesses take us to God, who can strengthen us. This answer comforted Paul and helped him understand that his problem allowed him to

feel God's power resting upon him. The Lord did not answer Paul's prayer in the way he expected, nor will He answer our myopic prayers in the way we first ask. Disciples have faith in Christ, not in the outcome of our prayers. God has a much larger perspective of what is best for us. We are assured that He acts in love for our good (Rom 8:33–38; Mose 1:39).

We learn more about the value of weaknesses in the Book of Mormon:

- “The Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace . . . that we have power to do these things” (Jac 4:7)
- “Out of weaknesses [we] shall be made strong” (2 Ne 3:13)
- “If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Eth 12:27; also see 2 Ne 33:4; Alm 58:37; D&C 35:17; 62:1; etc.).

Conversely, the scriptures also tell of people's weaknesses taking them further from God through pride. If we bring our weaknesses to the Lord, He can use them as a tool to draw us closer to Him (unlike Satan who uses them to separate us further from God). If we approach our weaknesses with meekness by asking the Lord, “What do I need to learn?” He can teach us how to use them as openings rather than barriers to the Spirit.<sup>24</sup> Weaknesses can become our strengths in at least two ways: they bring us closer to God as we humbly ask for help, and we work hard to tenaciously overcome them, which becomes a strength.

**2 Cor 12:10 (NIV).** *“I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* Paul grew to appreciate his challenges because they drew him closer to the Lord. The prophet John Taylor similarly taught,

It is necessary that we pass through certain ordeals in order that we may be purified. . . . We have learned many things through suffering. We call it suffering. I call it a school of experience. I never did bother my head much about these things. I do not today. What are these things for? Why is it that good men should be tried? Why is it, in fact, that we should have a devil? Why did not the Lord kill him long ago? Because he could not do without him. He needed the devil and a great many of those who do his bidding just to keep men straight, that we may learn to place our dependence upon God, and trust in him, and to observe his laws, and keep his commandments.<sup>25</sup>

Both President Taylor and Paul learned to appreciate weaknesses as the means to grow closer to God.

*Paul's concern for the Corinthian church and the signs of an Apostle—2 Cor 12:11–21*  
**2 Cor 12:11 (BSB).** *“I have become a fool, but you drove me to it.”* With a sarcastic joke, and probably a smile on his face, Paul finishes his foolish boasting to prove the falseness of his critics (see 2 Cor 5:12).

**2 Cor 12:12.** *“Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.”* Paul appeals to the Corinthians’ own experience of his apostolic authority. They saw him perform signs and wonders through the gifts of the Spirit as a true disciple. Luke’s account in Act 18:1–18 touched on Paul’s eighteen months in Corinth, including his powerful testimony, a vision, faith, hope, leadership, and endurance. Paul’s epistles speak of his charity for the Saints in Corinth.

**2 Cor 12:13 (ESV).** *“in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!”* Paul’s sarcasm returns with a joke about covering his own cost of living, begging their pardon (see Act 18:3). The Corinthian Saints may have felt “inferior” (NIV, NASB) to the other congregations—or at least the critics may have claimed that.

*Paul’s motivation for another visit—2 Cor 12:14–19*

**2 Cor 12:14 (NASB).** *“for this third time I am ready to come to you.”* Paul first opened the mission in Corinth during his second apostolic mission (Act 18:1; 1 Cor 2:1). No other trip to Corinth is mentioned since. More likely, Paul had prepared to go three times. The Greek grammar connects the “three” with “to come.” So it can read, “I am ready to come to you for the third time.”<sup>26</sup>

**2 Cor 12:14–15 (NASB).** *“and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you. . . . I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?”* Paul planned on coming without accepting the Corinthians’ financial support for his needs. He did not want their money, but he did want their hearts to turn fully toward God. The Corinthian Saints had been his spiritual children, and he hoped to spend his spiritual resources to win them back.

**2 Cor 12:16 (NIV).** *“I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you.”* Underlying Paul’s defensive approach, the real issue may have been that Paul had been accused of craftily exploiting the Saints. Piecing these points together, we surmise that his critics claimed his missionary efforts were motivated by money. He has tried to express that he “caught” them only to bless them; he certainly gained none of their money.

**2 Cor 12:17–18 (NIV).** *“Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you? . . . Titus did not exploit you, did he?”* Paul’s companion Titus traveled with at least two others (see 2 Cor 8:17–18). Paul asks the Saints to find evidence of their unity in the continuity of the Spirit of the Lord: “Walked we not in the same spirit?”

**2 Cor 12:19.** *“we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.”* Without any jesting, Paul reiterates that he worked for the Corinthian Saints’ edification alone—unlike other false Apostles who deceived the people for their own gains.

**2 Cor 12:20–21 (BSB).** *“I am afraid that when I come . . . there may be quarreling, jealousy, rage, rivalry, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder, . . . many who . . . have not repented.”* Paul worried about finding the Saints still plagued with contention, divisions, selfishness, arrogance, unrepentant hearts, and sexual sins that plagued the city of Corinth (see my discussion in 1 Cor 1:1).



## **2 Corinthians 13—Concluding Admonition and Greetings**

**2 Cor 13:1 (CEV).** *“I am on my way to visit you for the third time.”* Paul seems to suggest that this visit will be one application of the law of witnesses. The people will have two or three opportunities to hear his testimony. Jews and Christians knew God’s legal ruling that warned when He sends two or three witness or testimonies His truth is established and consequences or punishment will be administered.<sup>27</sup>

**2 Cor 13:2.** *“I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; . . . I will not spare.”* Paul forewarns those who need to repent that when he comes, he will require a Church cleansing.

**2 Cor 13:3 (CEV).** *“This should prove to you that I am speaking for Christ. When he corrects you, he won’t be weak. He will be powerful!”* Paul again addresses those who doubted that he was a full Apostle. In response, Paul warns those who had not repented that he would offer proof that Christ worked and spoke through him. Another interpretation of this verse reads, “You shall have the proof you desire. I may be weak in my dealings with you, compared to my critics, but Christ is not weak in dealing with you, and when I come I shall be the vehicle of His power among you.”

**2 Cor 13:4 (BSB).** *“He was indeed crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God’s power. And though we are weak in Him, yet by God’s power we will live with Him to serve you.”* Jesus came to earth as a baby and was crucified like a common robber. By worldly standards, His mortal experience appeared weak, though in reality His birth, life, and death worked through the power of God. Although Paul is also a weak human, he hoped to manifest God’s power as His special witness.

**2 Cor 13:5 (NIV).** *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.”* Paul challenged his audience to examine themselves—just as they had before they partook of the sacrament (1 Cor 11:28)—to find whether their faith were genuine.

**2 Cor 13:7–9 (BSB).** *“Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong . . . , and our prayer is for your perfection.”* This is a powerful idea. We cannot fight against truth; it will always conquer. We can only fight for the truth!

**2 Cor 13:10 (BSB).** *“This is why I write these things while absent, so that when I am present I will . . . use of the authority that the Lord gave me for building you up.”* Paul calls the Saints to repentance one last time: “Mend your ways” (NCB). Paul does not want to use his authority to tear down the opposition.

*Final exhortation, greeting, and benediction—2 Cor 13:11–14*

**2 Cor 13:11 (NIV).** *“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”* Paul pled with the Saints to comfort one another and exhort one another (or, it could be read, comfort by exhorting—as knowing the truth is comforting) so that the love and peace of God would be with them.

**2 Cor 13:12 (JST).** “Greet one another with **an holy kiss salutation.**” Repeatedly Joseph Smith changed this greeting.

**2 Cor 13:14 (NIV).** “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” The last phrase is Paul’s characteristic benediction.<sup>28</sup> The addition of the phrase “grace of the Lord” is amplified by mention of God’s love and the Spirit’s companionship.

## Notes

1 Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1969), 153.

2 Russell M. Nelson, “We can Do Better and Be Better,” April 2019 general conference, online at [churchofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org).

3 1 Cor 2:13; Eph 6:5; Php 2:12; Heb 12:2.

4 “Charis,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/5485.htm>.

5 D&C 42:30–36, 39, 53–55; 51:1–6; 55:4; 59:5; 70:4; 78:22; 82:19; 104:11–15, 17–18.

6 Steven C. Harper, “All Things Are the Lord’s: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants,” *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008), 212–228. Harper described, “The law of consecration found in the Doctrine and Covenants can be envisioned as a three-legged stool, where the legs are agency, stewardship, and accountability. Agency is the power we have to act independently on the law, regardless of what anyone else thinks, says, or does. . . . A steward is a free agent empowered to act independently but accountable to the actual owner for all actions. For this reason, the law is often and accurately referred to as both consecration and stewardship. . . . The Lord is adamant about the connections between agency, stewardship, and accountability. Because He has empowered us to act independently with His property, we will be held accountable.”

7 Richard Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2007), 140. Anderson called 2 Corinthians “an intense letter of relationships, a letter standing above all others in revealing Paul’s feelings about the gospel and his converts” (page 132).

8 See, for example, Ps 41:1–3; Pro 11:24–25; 19:17; 22:9.

9 See, for example, Deu 15:10; Ps 100:2; Pro 11:25.

10 Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 35–48, 459.

11 Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 460.

12 Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 480.

13 See, for example, Isa 50:1; 54:5–7; 62:5; Ezk 16:8; Hos 2:19–20.

14 Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of Women in the New Testament* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Sound Publishing, 2015), chapter 5. Anciently engagements were far more binding than modern ones and occurred at far younger ages. Ideally, Jewish men married at eighteen and women married a little younger—usually between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Mishnah, *Avoth* 5:21; *Kiddushin* 29b; Alfred Kingsley Glover, *Jewish Laws and Customs: Some of the Laws and Usages of the Children of the Ghetto* (Wells, MN: W. A. Hammond, 1900), 231; Ken M. Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 186n20; Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 224. The day after a girl's twelfth birthday, she was no longer a minor, and the day after she turned twelve and a half she could legally be married. Mishnah, *Kiddushin* 2:1. Given girls' young ages at marriage, the culture of gender segregation, and girls' social inexperience, it is not surprising that arranged marriages seemed the best cultural option. See Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus* 26:10–11, 22:3. With a betrothal, the young couple was married in a legal sense but was not to share bed and board until after the final ceremony a year or so later.

15 See Eph 5:27; Rev 19:7; 22:17.

16 See Act 17:19–22; 21:39; 22:3.

17 Paul probably spoke Aramaic at home, Hebrew in the synagogue and religious education, and Greek in school.

18 R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1913), available online at <https://sacred-texts.com/chr/apo/slanev.htm>.

19 Deu 28:58–59: “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.” Deu 24:9: “Remember what the Lord thy God did unto Miriam by the way, after that ye were come forth out of Egypt.” Ps 78:38–39: “But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.”

20 Justin Taylor, “The Ethnarch of King Aretas at Damascus: A Note on 2 Corinthians 11, 32–33,” *Revue Biblique* 99, no. 4 (1992): 719–728.

21 See Act 9:1–8; 16:9; 18:9; 22:17–21; 27:23; 1 Cor 15:8; Gal 1:12.

22 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1556, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/199>.

23 Andrew F. Ehat and Lindon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 10; also 9, 42, 110, 210, 327–331.

24 Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2018), chapter 6.

25 John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London, UK: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–1886), 23:334.

26 Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 557.

27 Deu 17:6; 19:15, Num 35:30. This was reconfirmed by Jesus in Mt 18:16; Jn 8:17.

28 See Rom 16:24; 1 Cor 16:24; Php 4:23; 2 Ths 3:16, 18; Tit 3:15; Heb 13:25.