



The Summit
Green Campus of Canton Baptist Temple

Resources for Your Life

2 Corinthians
14 Sessions

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Resource Guide

This resource was compiled from the personal Bible study and blog entries created by Tom Hogsed, pastor of the Summit in Green. You can find the original blog entries at www.tomhogsed.com.

The **introduction** to this book has been written so the reader has a better understanding of the Biblical author, his purpose in writing, and important points to understand before reading.

Following the introduction, each new page represents a **verse by verse overview** of the Scripture passage. The best way to study is to first read the Scripture verses from your Bible relying on the Holy Spirit to provide understanding and then to support your understanding with the commentary written below.

At the end of each Scripture commentary, there is a short **prayer** written so the reader can personally apply what has been discovered; however, it is suggested that you also pray from your heart in response to God's Word.

Feel free to make your own personal notes in your Bible, on this page, or even in a journal.

If this resource has helped you or you have further questions, please send an e-mail to tomhogsed@gmail.com.

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

The church at Corinth began while Paul was traveling through the city on his second missionary journey. Paul actually resided with the Corinthians for a year and a half and during this time he was able to personally teach them about the ways of Christ (see Acts 18:1-18). However, after Paul's departure, the Corinthian church encountered major problems and Paul wrote them a letter (1 Corinthians 5:9) in order to confront some issues. This letter has since been lost.

While Paul was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, he heard of more problems within the church, so he wrote another letter, which is known as 1 Corinthians. Paul used this letter to warn against their divisiveness and bring clarification about some issues within the Corinthian church. It seems as if Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians resolved some of the issues, but another threat entered into Corinth – false teachers. These teachers were misleading the Corinthian church by questioning the apostolic authority and sincerity of Paul, so he left Ephesus and attempted a brief visit to Corinth, but he was turned away by an arrogant insulter (2 Corinthians 2:1,5; 12:14; 13:1-2) . Since a personal visit was not well received, Paul returned to Ephesus and wrote a "severe" letter (2 Corinthians 2:4) to the Corinthians, which has since been lost.

Titus eventually gave Paul the news that many of the Corinthians had repented and affirmed their loyalty to Paul (2 Corinthians 7:7) as a result of his written letter. This news brought great joy to Paul. Although many had repented, Paul knew that the false teachers were still in Corinth and some of the Corinthians were still against him. With this in mind, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in order to defend his apostleship (2 Corinthians 1-7), to instruct them concerning giving (2 Corinthians 8-9), and to confront the false teachers directly (2 Corinthians 10-13).

2 Corinthians 1:1-24

Paul, along with Timothy, writes this letter to the church at Corinth as well as believers throughout Greece (1:1-2). The church at Corinth is known as the most immature congregation out of all the churches Paul planted. They struggled with divisiveness and numerous issues which restricted them from maturing in their faith (see 1 Corinthians); however, Paul's letter to them reflected his love for them and his desire to see them put aside their differences.

As he begins writing this second, canonical letter to the Corinthians, Paul offers his praise to God for bringing him and his companions comfort during trials (1:3-8); after all, Paul was very familiar with hardship (1:9-11). In fact, at one point in his life Paul thought he was going to die, but he determined to stop relying on himself and relied only on God (1:9). Paul had placed his full confidence in the plan of God, even though he was experiencing deep pain (1:10). The prayers offered on Paul's behalf during his time of trial also brought him great comfort (1:11).

After his brief greeting and an expression of gratefulness to God, Paul moves into the real reason why he was writing – to defend his sincerity and apostolic authority. The false teachers had obviously questioned Paul's genuineness, so he made it clear that he had always conducted himself in holiness and sincerity (1:12-14). Paul goes on to explain a change in his travel plans that the false teachers may have used as "proof" that Paul did not really care about the Corinthians (1:15-24). This change of itinerary, Paul explains, was an act of grace which spared them a "severe rebuke" from him for their immaturity and entertaining of false teachers (1:23). He did not desire to exercise disciplinary action and dominate them with his authority, but rather to work together with them so that they would be able to stand firm in their faith (1:24). It is apparent that Paul deeply cared about the spiritual well-being of the Corinthian church and this is why he began his letter by expressing his desire for the believers at Corinth to experience joy.

Dear God, give me a passion to see spiritual maturity in the people You have entrusted to me.

2 Corinthians 2:1-17

Paul continued to remind the Corinthian church that he had not personally visited them because he did not want to cause grief or pain (1:23-24) through swift disciplinary action for their wrongdoing (2:1). Although it would have been Paul's right to visit and demand that they change their ways, he knew that he should be patient with them and therefore used written words to share his heart for them (2:2-4). The contents of Paul's written letter is not entirely known; in fact, the only indication about its' contents are detailed in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 and 7:5-12. It appears that the actions of one man resulted in the severe letter written by Paul to the Corinthians, but no details are provided about the infraction which took place (2:5). It is possible that this man had personally attacked Paul or questioned his apostolic authority, but Paul was calling for the Corinthian Christians to extend comfort and forgiveness so that this man would not become discouraged (2:6-10). Paul knew that harboring unforgiveness or bitterness toward another person could possibly cause division within the church and Paul did not want to give Satan an opportunity to destroy the church at Corinth (2:11).

Paul then writes concerning the opportunities for ministry given to him by God (2:12-17). He had been spreading the message of hope through Jesus Christ from city to city as he was being led by God (2:14). Paul described spreading this message of hope as a sweet smelling fragrance (2:15), although some people reacted in different ways. Paul writes, "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life" (2:15-16). Paul carefully handled this message entrusted to him by God and did not want to be associated with many who were simply preaching for personal gain (2:17). Preaching the good news about Jesus Christ with sincerity and authority was important to Paul because He knew that God was watching (2:17).

Dear God, help me to freely forgive others and preach with sincerity.

2 Corinthians 3:1-18

The false teachers, who had been vigorously attacking Paul's apostolic authority, brought into question his legitimacy as a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many parts of Paul's letter to the church at Corinth formed his defense against these unnecessary onslaughts. Although the Corinthian people had no reason to question Paul's authority, he sarcastically asked them if he should reintroduce himself or present them with the appropriate documents to prove his position (3:1). Ultimately, the only documentation Paul needed to prove his authority to preach the gospel was not written on a piece of paper, but on the lives of those who had been changed through his preaching and ministry amongst the Corinthians (3:2-3). This change, which was evident in the church of Corinth, had not been accomplished in Paul's own strength, but with the power of God working through him (3:4-5).

Not only did Paul's dependence on the power of God separate him from the false teachers, but also his message. The false teachers had deceived the people into thinking that forgiveness could be received through obedience to the Law of Moses, but Paul's message was of the new covenant, which was that Jesus Christ provided forgiveness through His sacrificial death on the cross (3:6). The Law of Moses only exposed a person's utter sinfulness, but the new covenant gave life and forgiveness through the spirit of God who entered into those who believed in Jesus Christ as the payment for sin (3:7-11). In comparison, the Law of Moses brought death, but the new covenant which was preached by Paul brought righteousness (3:9).

The new covenant brought hope and boldness to the ministry of Paul (3:12). As a part of the old covenant, Moses did not possess the boldness realized in the time of Paul because the new covenant had not yet been revealed (3:13). The old covenant consisted of symbols, types, and mystery while the new covenant (forgiveness through the death of Jesus Christ) brought understanding of God's plan to save mankind from sin (3:14-16). Then when forgiveness is received through belief in Jesus Christ, a person gains freedom from sin and the demands of the law (3:17) and the Spirit begins the work of transformation (3:18). This was the message of Paul.

Dear God, bring transformation through the Spirit in my life.

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

The forgiveness of God through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, provides victory for those who believe, but trials are still present in this life. Although Jesus defeated sin (2:14) and the Spirit begins the transformation process in our lives (3:18), Paul knew that believers might become discouraged by hardships so he wrote that they should never give up (4:1). The message of hope and salvation through Jesus Christ was an important message which should not be abandoned because of trials or persecution.

Paul was currently facing persecution from the false teachers, who were accusing him of deceiving people and teaching an erroneous message, but Paul vehemently defended his ministry. It was the false teachers whose minds were corrupt and whose hearts were darkened (4:2-4). Paul preached Jesus Christ as Lord and presented Him as the One who brought light to us all (4:6).

In order to endure persecution, Paul drew his strength from the power of God and all who believe in Jesus Christ will also need God's power to endure hardship (4:7). Paul writes a few words of encouragement concerning persecution and endurance, "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies" (4:8-10, NLT). Weakness is an opportunity for God to show His great power. Even though Paul risked his life through preaching the gospel, he was confident that the same power which raised Jesus from the dead would also raise him up one day (4:11-15). Paul then explained that he does not lose heart in the midst of persecution (4:16).

Although his body was wasting away with each passing day, the inner man was being renewed each day (4:16). This renewal provided hope in the future and deterred him from giving up on the ministry which had been given to him by God (4:17-18).

Dear God, I need Your strength in the middle of my trials so that I might never give up and carry on the ministry to which You've called me.

2 Corinthians 5:1-21

The trials faced by believers can be overwhelming at times (4:7-15) and Paul wrote to encourage the Corinthians to keep the proper perspective during hardship. Although the physical body is worn down through trials and persecution and is getting closer to death with each passing day (4:16a), the inner man is being renewed day by day through the power of Christ (4:16b). Adversity should not cause those who believe in Christ to quit or give up because there is a guarantee of eternal life and reward (4:17-18). Paul continues this thought by reminding the Corinthians that the physical body (Paul calls it a tent) will eventually be destroyed, but the destruction of that body will give way to a new body fashioned by divine hands (5:1). All believers desire to be freed from the weak and frail bodies which have been torn apart by sin (5:2-6) so they can inherit eternal life in the presence of God. This is a reality we accept by faith (5:7) and Paul writes in confidence that absence from the physical body will be followed by eternity with God (5:8).

Until the physical body is finally destroyed by death, the follower of Christ should make it his or her "aim" to please God through living in obedience because "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (5:10). Every believer is held accountable to God for the way he has lived his life. This judgment is not a judgment for sin (Christ paid for sin on the cross), but a judgment concerning things accomplished for the sake of God during their time on earth. Knowing that he would be held accountable for his life, Paul spent his time persuading men to be reconciled to God (5:11; 5:20).

Paul was willing to do anything, even if it appeared crazy to the false teachers (5:12-13), to persuade men to believe in Jesus Christ, who died for sin and rose again to secure eternal life (5:14-15). Paul believed that all men were valuable in the eyes of God and could experience new life in Christ and be freed from the power of sin (5:17). When a person experiences new life in Christ, God gives that individual the "ministry of reconciliation," meaning that they can participate in proclaiming to sinners that they can be reconciled (made right) with God through belief in the death of Jesus Christ for sin (5:18-20). Paul then summarizes the message believers are to proclaim to those who have not yet believed, "For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ" (5:21).

Dear God, thank You for a future hope in Your presence, but I also pray that You would use me to proclaim reconciliation to sinners.

2 Corinthians 6:1-7:1

Thus far in his letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul had defended his ministry against false teachers and those who had questioned his sincerity (2 Corinthians 1-3). Although Paul experienced incredible persecution and accusations from those who desired to destroy him, he wrote about the ministry of the gospel given to him by God and his unwavering commitment to withstand the onslaughts (2 Corinthians 4). Paul was careful to remind the church at Corinth that this confidence was founded in the power of Christ, who brings daily renewal to the inner man (4:16-18). Even though his body had been worn down through persecution and personal attacks, Paul looked forward to a future resurrection where he was guaranteed eternity in the presence of God (5:1-8). Paul made it his aim to please God through the way he lived his life in spite of his circumstances (5:9-11). Most of his ministry had been spent preaching the necessity of believing in Jesus Christ, who died for sin and rose again, and now he challenged those who had believed in Christ to urge others to be made right with God (5:12-21).

Since many in the Corinthian church had been set free from sin and made right with God through Jesus Christ, they had become "workers together" with Paul; however, he warned them about taking this for granted (6:1). It is possible that the Corinthians had fallen victim to the false teachers and were fearful of possible persecution if they proclaimed the message of hope through Jesus Christ, so Paul encouraged them to embrace the persecution which stems from speaking the truth. Paul spoke from experience. He had been through numerous times of trial (6:2-10), but endured them with joy.

Paul then turned his full attention to the Corinthians and, in love (6:11-13), he called them to live holy lives before God by separating themselves from associations which were detrimental to their relationship with God (6:14-16a). God desired to "dwell with them and walk among them" (6:16b). God deeply desired to be their God and he desired them to be His people; therefore, the Corinthians could not be divided in their loyalty. Drawing from God's words in Isaiah 52:11 Paul commanded the Corinthians to "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (6:17-18). Since God has promised to be our God and dwell among us, we should "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (7:1).

Dear God, cleanse me of all associations which distract me from a relationship with You. I embrace You as my God. Dwell in me, walk with me, and be a Father to me.

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

The false teachers who had infiltrated the Corinthian church assaulted the character of Paul in order to turn the people away from him and further spread their erroneous teachings. So in an effort to defend himself and protect the purity of the church Paul paid a visit to Corinth, but he was not well received (2:1); in fact, he was openly ridiculed by an individual, possibly one of the false teachers (2:5-8, 10; 7:12). Paul was devastated that the believers in Corinth had not defended him or remained loyal to the one who loved them so much. Eventually the Corinthians repented (7:7) after Paul had returned to Ephesus and wrote a "severe" letter delivered by the hand of Titus (7:15-16).

In this part of the letter, Paul wanted to make sure that the Corinthians knew he had forgiven them so he shares his heart regarding the situation and his joy in their repentance. Paul invited them to open their heart to him because he had never "corrupted" or "cheated" them in any of his actions (7:2). He had always conducted himself with integrity and sincerity. Paul did not blame them for believing his accusers.

He knew the false teachers employed deceitfulness and trickery to lure the Corinthians away from the truth. Instead of holding this incident against the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation" (7:3-4). The anguish and disappointment resulting from the Corinthians' rejection of Paul had not caused him to lose his joy, but he took great comfort in Titus' report of their repentance (7:5-8). Paul even expressed Titus' incredible joy concerning their repentance (7:13-16).

Paul wrote, "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (7:9-10). The Corinthians had been cleared of their wrongdoing as a result of their repentance, meaning that they turned from their sin and pursued a right relationship with God (7:11-12). Sorrow over one's sin should naturally lead a person to repentance (turning from sin and restoring our relationship with God), but without repentance there can be no forgiveness. When repentance is accompanied by faith in Jesus, it brings salvation from the power and penalty of sin. The practice of repentance continues as the believer is sorrowful about the daily sins which break fellowship with God.

Dear God, when I sin, may I be sorrowful and turn from my wrongdoing so that I can passionately pursue You once again.

2 Corinthians 8:1-24

This chapter marks the end of Paul's defense of his ministry against false teachers (2 Corinthians 1-7) and the beginning of a discussion regarding financial giving (2 Corinthians 8-9). For several years Paul had been collecting an offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-28; Galatians 2:10). The Corinthians heard about this offering and inquired about how they could be involved in providing for the poor (1 Corinthians 16:1). Although Paul had given them instructions on how to collect money for this offering (1 Corinthians 16:2-4), the believers at Corinth had not yet responded.

Paul writes to Corinth about the extreme generosity of the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) who had given toward this offering even though they were experiencing great trials and financial struggles of their own (8:1-5). The churches in Macedonia had first given themselves completely to God and then allowed God to use them to help others in their time of hardship (8:5). Paul desired the Corinthians to also be used by God in helping those in Jerusalem, so he had sent Titus to urge them in this expression of love for others (8:6-7). Paul would not force the Corinthians to give (8:8), but he reminded them that giving generously best reflects the actions of Christ who sacrificed Himself so that others could be freed from sin (8:9). The Corinthians desired to participate in this offering a year ago and Paul advised them to finish what they had started so that God could continue to provide for their own needs (8:10-15).

In order to remove any doubt about Paul's motivation for collecting this offering, he sent Titus and two other unnamed, but well-respected, men to collect and handle this offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem (8:16-23). In reality, contributing to this offering was a chance for the church at Corinth to prove their love for God and others because giving is one of the highest forms of love (8:24).

Dear God, help me to love others by giving when it is in my power to do so.

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul wrote to the church at Corinth concerning the offering he was collecting for the purpose of helping the poor believers in Jerusalem. A year earlier, the Corinthian Christians asked Paul how they could financially help those in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1) and Paul provided them with some instructions (1 Corinthians 16:2-4); however, the Corinthians had not yet gathered that offering. The churches in Macedonia had already collected money to meet the needs of the poor believers in Jerusalem (8:1-5), so Paul sent Titus along with two other men to urge the Corinthians toward generosity in this matter (8:6-24). It is likely that the false teachers had called into question Paul's motives for collecting this money and this is the reasoning behind Paul sending other men to collect the offering.

Paul had a great desire for the church at Corinth to participate in this offering, so he shared his heart with them in regards to this circumstance (9:1). It appears that Paul had made the Macedonian churches aware of the Corinthians' desire to take a collection for the destitute believers in Jerusalem and hearing this caused the churches in Macedonia to also give (9:2). Now it was time for the Christians in Corinth to follow through with their offering so that Paul would not be ashamed of his boasting in them (9:3-5). The words Paul writes next provide the foundation for generous giving, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (9:6-7). If the Corinthians would give generously and willingly, God would bring blessing to them because He has a special love for those who find pleasure in giving (9:8-9). Although God is the one who provides the means for people to give, He is also the One who can take generous gifts and multiply the effects in the giver as well as in the one who receives (9:10-15). If the Corinthians would practice generous giving, the believers at Jerusalem would give praise to God (9:12-13) and offer prayers on their behalf for the grace of God evidenced through them (9:14). Paul summed up his challenge of generous giving by reminding them of the "indefinable gift" given to them in Jesus Christ. Christ willingly and generously gave up His own life so that many could experience forgiveness and freedom from sin.

Dear God, may I be known as a willing and generous giver.

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

There is a noticeable change of emphasis in 2 Corinthians 10-13 causing some to believe that these chapters do not belong at the end of the letter (but at the beginning) or that these words should be attached to Paul's "severe letter" spoken of in 2 Corinthians 2:4. The first nine chapters are primarily a defense of Paul's apostolic authority against false teachers and also instructions to the Corinthians regarding the offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem. These chapters are addressed to those Corinthian Christians who had repented and remained loyal to Paul; however, the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians are best understood as Paul's words to those who were still questioning his authority and remained deceived by the false teachers in Corinth. He offered these words as a challenge to, once again, return to a devotion to Jesus Christ and his chosen apostle.

Paul began his address to those who were not loyal to him by asking them to repent so he would not be forced to confront them in boldness when he came to them (10:1-2). In order to discredit him, the false teachers accused Paul of walking in the flesh (10:2b). Although Paul acknowledged walking in the physical flesh, he reminded them that he did not fight his battles with weapons such as human reasoning and empty words (10:3). Instead, Paul used spiritual weapons which were given strength through the power of God and they were capable of "pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled" (10:4-6).

Paul was prepared to battle these false teachers with the power of God knowing that He could free the Corinthians from these deceptive men.

These teachers seemingly taught that they were apostles of Jesus Christ (10:7; 11:23), which brought confusion to some in the Corinthian church. It is possible that they were Jews (11:22) who came from Jerusalem demanding the circumcision of the Gentiles and obedience to the law of Moses (Acts 15:5).

Whatever they were teaching, Paul referred to it as an erroneous gospel (11:4). Paul also challenged the Corinthians to accept his authority as being from God (10:8-11) and reject the false teachers' claims to Christ. The measurement of their authority was based on human standards and man-made systems, which were bogus benchmarks (10:12). Paul refused to boast in human accomplishments. He would only pride himself in what God had accomplished through him and what was yet to be done (10:13-16). This outlook on his authority caused Paul to write, "But he who glories, let him glory in the Lord. For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (10:17-18). The false teachers boasted in themselves, while Paul found his fulfillment in God's commendation. If the Corinthians were going to return their loyalty to God, they would need to see through the false teachers' selfish motivations and claims to authority. This was Paul's greatest desire.

Dear God, make me discerning in my loyalties so that I may be faithful to You alone.

2 Corinthians 11:1-33

Beginning in 2 Corinthians 10, Paul changed his tone and wrote directly to those in Corinth who were still questioning his apostolic authority. The false teachers in Corinth had led many in the church to reject the teachings of Paul causing them to be disloyal to him. Paul loved the Corinthians and was not willing to allow the false teachers to deceive them any longer so he wrote in defense of the authority which had been given to him by God (2 Corinthians 10:1-18). Paul's desire was to present the church of Corinth to Christ as pure and holy (11:1-2), but their minds were being corrupted by erroneous doctrine (11:3); in fact, he compares their being deceived with the deception Eve experienced in the garden of Eden (11:3). Paul makes it very clear that the Corinthian church must reject anyone who preaches another Jesus or a different gospel than he had preached to them (11:4). Failure to turn from these false teachings would certainly invite God's judgment upon them.

In the next few verses, Paul defends his conduct as an apostle. The false teachers had questioned Paul's apostleship saying that he was not associated with the twelve apostles (11:5-6) and that he was not a trained speaker worthy of pay (11:7-9); however, Paul denied both of these accusations by explaining that he had humbled himself in order to more effectively minister to the believers at Corinth (11:10-12).

These deceptive teachers had attempted to destroy Paul's ministry with the Corinthians, but he exposed these teachers as "false apostles" and "deceitful workers" who had transformed themselves into the "apostles of Christ" (11:13). The reason they appeared to be apostles of Christ is because they were associated with Satan, who also knows how to disguise lies as the truth (11:14-15).

Although Paul's defense of his apostleship may have sounded arrogant or foolish to the Corinthians, their disloyalty had forced him to defend his God-given authority (11:16-21). He had suffered frequent imprisonment (11:23), beatings (11:24-25a), stonings (11:25b), peril in travels (11:25c-26), extreme hunger and thirst (11:27), and numerous other hardships all for the sake of taking the gospel to those who needed hope (11:22-33). The Corinthians could not question Paul's motivation because no one would continually expose themselves to that much suffering without being absolutely convinced that they were walking in the truth. A decision had to be made by those Corinthians who were still questioning Paul's apostolic authority. Would they fall prey to the deceptive words of the false teachers or would they turn their loyalty back to Paul, who had suffered much to bring them the gospel?

Dear God, protect people from the lies of Satan, who attempts to disguise lies as the truth.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Paul used the majority of this letter to the church of Corinth to defend his apostolic authority against the false teachers who had entered the city (2 Corinthians 1-7). They had called into question Paul's motives and sincerity causing many to withdraw their loyalty from Paul who had delivered the gospel to them and spent time trying to help them mature in their faith. Although many had accepted the lies of the false teachers, Paul lovingly exhorted the Corinthians to return to the truth and separate themselves from these teachers (2 Corinthians 6-7). After defending his God-given authority, Paul addressed the offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8-9). One year earlier the Corinthians committed to contribute to this offering, but had not yet followed through on that promise. Paul wrote a few words about the importance of generous giving. Paul concluded his letter by directly writing to those who were still following these men who were spreading lies (2 Corinthians 10-13).

In 2 Corinthians 10-11, Paul appealed for the repentance of those Corinthians who were still being deceived and even detailed his ministry as an apostle. Apparently, these teachers compared themselves to Paul in order to discredit his sincerity, so Paul was compelled to detail all the things he had suffered for the sake of the gospel. Although Paul was reluctant to boast in himself, he made sure that he gave all glory to God for what had been accomplished through him. One of the areas that the false teachers boasted in was their supposed visions and revelations from God. Paul was familiar with visions and revelations; in fact, the book of Acts records six of them (9:12; 16:9-10; 18:9; 22:17-18; 23:11; 27:23-24) and a couple of his letters also document his visions (Galatians 1:12, 2:2; Ephesians 3:3). Here he recounted a vision which had occurred fourteen years ago when he was caught up into the third heaven (12:1-6). The first heaven is the earth's atmosphere. The second heaven is outer space. The third heaven is the dwelling place of God. During this vision he heard "inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (12:4). In this vision, obviously from God, Paul became aware of things that he could not speak. He hoped that the Corinthians would understand that he was truly an apostle sent by God and that these false teachers were simply seeking to deceive them.

In case the Corinthians thought that he was trying to simply promote his strengths, Paul exposed to them a weakness (12:7-10). God had given Paul a "thorn in the flesh" so that he would remain humble. This continual, painful circumstance was a direct result of God allowing a messenger (angel) from Satan to plague Paul (12:7). Many explanations have been given concerning Paul's "thorn in the flesh," but it seems better that it is not specifically defined because it provides a broad application to those who experience weakness. Even though Paul begged God to take away the circumstance (12:8), God chose not to remove it but rather give him the strength to endure. God gave Paul some beautiful words to embrace through his difficulty, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). Instead of allowing the circumstance to control his life, he took pleasure in it for the sake of Christ, knowing that when he was weak, God could show Himself strong (12:10).

Dear God, may I find strength in weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:11-13:14

In his concluding words of this letter to the church at Corinth, Paul urges those who were still being deceived by the false teachers to repent of their sin and return to the truth. These teachers had used trickery and deceitfulness to lead many of the Corinthians astray, causing them to question Paul's apostolic authority and sincerity. Since Paul would soon be paying a visit to Corinth (12:14), his greatest desire was that the Corinthians would abandon these wicked teachers and receive him with open arms.

Most of this letter had been spent defending his sincerity and divine authority (2 Corinthians 1-7, 10-12), even though Paul did not like to boast about his accomplishments (12:11-13). With a great sense of urgency, Paul used his final words to the church at Corinth to evidence his love for them. He writes, "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved" (12:15). Paul's love for Corinth was growing, while the love they had for him was faltering. The Corinthians had no reason to question Paul's love or sincerity; after all, Paul (or his associates) had never taken advantage of them nor had he been a burden to them during his stay in Corinth (12:16-19).

Upon his arrival in Corinth, Paul feared discovering people consumed by "...contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults" (12:20). Finding unrepentant hearts amongst the Corinthian people would be devastating to Paul (12:21); however, he promised to deal with any sin which remained in Corinth upon his visit (13:1-2). And those who were still seeking proof that Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ would have it when he arrived in the power of the resurrected Christ and dealt with any rebellion found in the church (13:3-4). Paul challenged them to examine their own hearts to see whether their conduct was reflecting a genuine faith in Jesus Christ (13:5-6). Paul's prayer was that the Corinthians' faith would be found genuine and that their lives would consistently demonstrate obedience to God (13:7-9). In case Paul's reason for writing had gotten lost in all of his words, he summarized his purpose for writing the letter in 2 Corinthians 13:10, "Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction." The Corinthians, especially the ones who had still not repented, had a choice to make. Would they remain loyal to the false teachers or would they return their loyalty to Christ and His apostles?

Although his benediction is brief, Paul writes some final words to the Corinthians to encourage them in faithfulness, "Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen" (13:11-14). Paul's letter to the church at Corinth was complete and they needed to make a decision about the words Paul had written.

Dear God, may I remain loyal to You and reject any teachings which are contrary to the truth You've revealed through Your word.