

## 2 CORINTHIANS | *Hearts Open Wide*

*“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians. Our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.” - 2 Corinthians 6:11-13*

### 1. Questions.

- What lessons can we learn from 2 Corinthians for our own lives?
- How should we handle difficult or uncomfortable relational friction?
- How should we respond when we experience pain and testing from others in the church?
- How do we handle criticism levelled at us?
- How do we press on when we are afflicted, burdened beyond our strength, despairing of life, and facing fear within and fear without?
- How do we maintain resiliency in ministry when we face significant challenges?
- How do we reconcile and restore the rebellious in our families?

PAUL'S CORINTHIAN CONTACTS							
<i>Paul's first visit</i>	His former letter	Their letter to him	1 Corinthians	<i>Paul's painful visit</i>	His severe letter	2 Corinthians	<i>Paul's future visit</i>

### 2. Context.

- Since Paul's second letter, *1 Corinthians*, the Corinthian church has been swayed by false apostles, high jackers, who oppose Paul. These “super apostles” are proclaiming another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel (11:4). They are led by a ringleader (10:11-12) who vigorously attacks Paul's apostolic authority.
- When Timothy returns from Corinth (1 Co 16:10-11), he brings Paul a report of this continuing opposition. Paul then makes a brief and “painful” visit to Corinth (2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2). His effort to resolve the conflict is unsuccessful. Paul suffers insult and loses face (7:12).
- Paul then returns to Ephesus and writes a “severe” letter to the Corinthians and sends it to them by Titus (2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:18). The letter instructs the church to discipline the ringleader of the opposition (2:1-11; 7:8).
- Soon thereafter, Paul, persecuted in Ephesus (Ac 20:1) and anxious to learn the results of Titus' trip to Corinth, goes to Troas and then to Macedonia, looking for Titus on his return trip (2:12-13; 7:5-16). He meets Titus in Macedonia and, to his great relief, he learns that a majority of the Corinthians have had a change of heart. This brings Paul tremendous joy.
- However, there is still a rebellious minority, led by a group of “super-apostles” (11:5, 13; 12:11). Further, Paul will soon himself come to Corinth, and he wants everything

[www.firmfoundation.org.nz](http://www.firmfoundation.org.nz) | [mail@firmfoundation.org.nz](mailto:mail@firmfoundation.org.nz) | 027 557 9314

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ready for his arrival. So he, along with Timothy, writes this letter from Macedonia, probably Philippi, and sends it along with Titus and another brother (8:16-24). It is ad 56.

- f. Paul will then make his third trip to Corinth (12:14; 13:1-2; Ac 20:1-3). It will be then that he completes and sends his famous letter to the Romans.



### 3. Purposes. Paul writes to:

- a. Encourage the repentant majority.
  - (1) **2 Co 1:3-5** 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Messiah, the Father of mercies and God of all encouragement (παράκλησις), 4 who encourages us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction, with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. 5 For as we share abundantly in Messiah's sufferings, so through Messiah we share abundantly in encouragement too.
- b. Explain his changed travel plans.
  - (1) **2 Co 1:16-17** 16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. 17 Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say Yes, yes and No, no at the same time?
- c. Complete the financial collection for the saints in Judea.
  - (1) **2 Co 8:7** 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.
- d. Vindicate his apostleship in view of criticisms.
  - (1) **2 Co 11:5** 5 Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles.
- e. Prepare for his third visit to Corinth.

- (1) **2 Co 13:10** 10 For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.
- f. Promote restoration of the rebellious minority.
- (1) **2 Co 13:9** 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for.
- (2) **2 Co 13:11** 11 Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

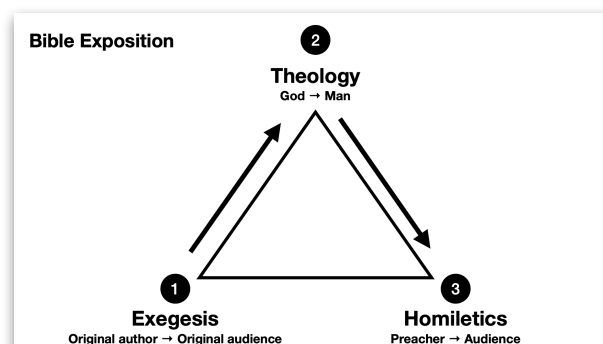
#### 4. Outline

#### 5. Characteristics.

- 2 Corinthians* is perhaps the most personal book in the New Testament. *Romans* reveals Paul's mind, but this book reveals his heart, character, motives, priorities, desires, and emotions.
- We get a glimpse into aspects of Paul's personal life that would otherwise be unknown, like his vision of paradise (12:1-7) and his thorn in the flesh (12:7-10). Paul bears his heart and life more than he does in his other letters.
- Paul's emotional stress is seen in his many digressions. *2 Corinthians* is the most unsystematic of his writings. It is also viewed by many as the most difficult of Paul's letters to interpret.
- There are some real gems in *2 Corinthians*. Eighty individual verses lend themselves to extended meditation and exposition.<sup>1</sup>
  - 2 Co 4:12** 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.
  - 2 Co 5:17** 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.
  - 2 Co 13:14** 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Messiah, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

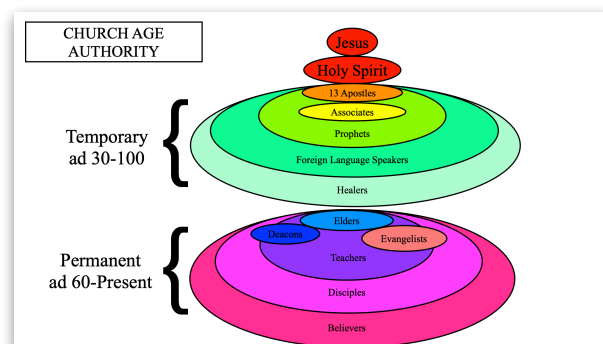
#### 6. Message.

- Presupposition: We are all believer-priests. We are all ministers of reconciliation. We are all an "apostle Paul" in our own field of ministry. Every member of this church is a minister. We are all "kings" over the kingdom God has assigned. We all exercise authority in some way. We all have an "area of influence" (10:13, 15). Every human is a designated sphere of authority by God. That's what makes us human. So let's learn from the apostle Paul how to minister.



<sup>1</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 47.

- b. The exposition of *1 Corinthians* is really about the nature and practice of Christian ministry. Because we are all Christian ministers, we need to know about the nature and practice of our ministry.
- c. The nature of Christian ministry.
  - (1) The authority of Christian ministry begins with the Lord Jesus Christ, passes down through the apostles to us in the local church, governed by a team of elders.
  - (2) Those in authority:
    - (a) Must not be ashamed of their authority.
      - 1) **2 Co 10:8** 8 For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord [Jesus] gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed.
    - (b) Must be servant leaders and die for those they lead.
      - 1) **2 Co 4:5** 5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.
      - 2) **2 Co 4:12** 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.
      - 3) **2 Co 4:15** 15 For it is all for your sake....
      - 4) **2 Co 12:15** 15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.
    - (c) Must at times act with boldness.
      - 1) **2 Co 7:4** 4 I am acting with great boldness toward you.
      - 2) **2 Co 13:2** 2 I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them....
    - (d) Must be respected by all.
      - 1) "We must bow to the authority of Christ in the church by recognizing and responding appropriately to those whom He has appointed to various roles in the body. We identify these people by their gifts (divinely-given abilities) and by their offices (divinely-given positions)."<sup>2</sup>



- (3) The resources of Christian ministry are:
  - (a) God's encouragement.
    - 1) **2 Co 1:3-7** 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all encouragement, 4 who encourages us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction, with the encourage with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Constable, *Notes on 2 Corinthians*, 9.

- 2) **2 Co 4:1** 1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.
- 3) **2 Co 4:16** 16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.
- (b) God's power.
  - 1) **2 Co 12:9** 9 But he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Messiah may rest upon me.
  - 2) **2 Co 13:4** 4 For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.
- (c) Prayer.
  - 1) **2 Co 13:9** 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for.
- (4) The experience of Christian ministry involves:
  - (a) Affliction.
    - 1) **2 Co 1:3-7**
    - 2) **2 Co 4:8-12** 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.
    - 3) **2 Co 6:4-10** 4 ...But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger.... 8 We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.
    - 4) God's men and women often suffer: Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, Jesus, and Paul all suffered greatly
    - 5) Christian ministry, done faithfully, is not a walk in the park. Going in we must have the attitude of dying so that others may live.
  - (b) Friction.
    - 1) **2 Co 2:1** 1 For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.
    - 2) **2 Co 7:8** 8 For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it —though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while.
    - 3) **2 Co 10:10** 10 For they say, His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.
  - (c) Confident hope.
    - 1) **2 Co 1:14** 14 ...That on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.



- 2) **2 Co 3:12** 12 Because we have such a hope, we are very bold....
- 3) **2 Co 4:14** 14 ...Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.
- 4) **2 Co 4:17** 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison....
- d. The practice of Christian ministry.
  - (1) The message of Christian ministry is one of reconciliation to God through Christ.
    - (a) **2 Co 3:6** 6 ...Who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.
    - (b) **2 Co 4:5-6** 5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Messiah as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge (γνῶσις) of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Messiah.
    - (c) **2 Co 5:17-19** 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Messiah reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. 19 That is, in Messiah God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.
  - (2) The character of Christian ministry requires:
    - (a) Integrity.
      - 1) **2 Co 4:2** 2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.
      - 2) **2 Co 5:11** 11 But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.
      - 3) **2 Co 7:2** 2 We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.
      - 4) **2 Co 11:7** 7 Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?
    - (b) Authenticity and transparency.
      - 1) **2 Co 6:11-13** 11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians. Our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. 13 In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.
      - 2) **2 Co 7:2** 2 Make room in your hearts for us
  - (3) The exercise of Christian ministry involves:
    - (a) Restoration of the rebellious.
      - 1) **2 Co 2:7** 7 ...So you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.
      - 2) **2 Co 7:9-11** 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. 11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you,

but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

- 3) **2 Co 13:9-11** 9 Your restoration is what we pray for. 10 For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. 11 Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace....

(b) Teamwork for the spread of the gospel.

- 1) **2 Co 10:16** 16 ...So that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you....

(c) Financial giving.

- 1) **2 Co 8:7** 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

- 2) **2 Co 8:10** 10 And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.

- 3) **2 Co 8:24** 24 So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

- (4) The church is to submit to revealed authority, draw upon supernatural resources and equipment, and experience triumph through tribulation as it executes its mission. In doing so it will effectively carry out its ministry of proclaiming God's message of reconciliation to the world.<sup>3</sup>

## 7. Key Takeaways.

a. God.

b. Jesus.

c. Biblical Story.

- (1) The New covenant far surpasses the Old covenant in glory.

d. Angels, Satan, and Demons.

- (1) **2 Co 2:10-11** 10 ...What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, 11 so that we would not be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs.

- (2) **2 Co 4:4** 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- (3) **2 Co 11:3** 3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ

- (4) **2 Co 11:13-15** 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:131-47.

- (5) **2 Co 12:7** 7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.
- e. Christian Life.
- (1) Separation.
  - (2) Suffering.
  - (3) Repentance.
- (a) **2 Co 12:19-21** 19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. 20 For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. 21 I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.
- 1) These could be unbelievers, but probably they are believers who have not changed their attitude/heart/mindset about the sinfulness of their previous sin. They have not agreed with God that their previous behaviour was wrong.
- f. Church.
- (1) The church is worth fighting for.
  - (2) Godly authority and leadership is crucial in the church.
  - (3) Giving.
  - (4) Evangelism.
- g. End Times.
- (1) Resurrection.
  - (2) Judgment Seat of Messiah.

## 8. Lessons for Life.

- a. Run towards problems you need to deal with, not away from them.
- b. Don't give up on your rebellious children.
  - (1) Example: Papa's letters to me when I was rebelling against Christ.
  - (2) **2 Co 6:1** 1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.
  - (3) **2 Co 7:8-11** 8 For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting.
  - (4) **2 Co 12:14** 14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you.
  - (5) **2 Co 13:1** 1 This is the third time I am coming to you.
- c. In a mature way, be a church where we can be authentic/transparent/real with one another.
  - (1) **2 Co 6:11-13** 11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians. Our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. 13 In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.



- d. Don't put up with "super-apostles."
- (1) **2 Co 11:4** 4 For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.
  - (2) **2 Co 11:19-20** 19 For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! 20 For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.
  - (3) Examples: Full gospel, Witness Lee, Hebrew roots.