

2 Corinthians: Discipleship Lessons Participant Guide Handout Sheets

If you're working with a class or small group, feel free to duplicate the following handouts in this appendix at no additional charge. If you'd like to print 8-1/2" x 11" sheets, you can download the free Participant Guide handout sheets at:

www.jesuswalk.com/2corinthians/2corinthians-lesson-handouts.pdf

Discussion Questions

You'll find 3 to 5 questions for each lesson. Each question may include several sub-questions. These are designed to get group members engaged in discussion of the key points of the passage. If you're running short of time, feel free to skip questions or portions of questions.

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

1. The God of All Comfort (1:1-11)
2. Tension with the Corinthians (1:12-2:11)
3. The Fragrance of Christ's Ministering People (2:12-3:6)
4. Being Changed by God's Glory (3:7-18)
5. Treasures in Clay Pots (4:1-18)
6. Walking by Faith, Not by Sight (5:1-16)
7. The Ministry of Reconciliation (5:17-6:2)
8. Hardships, Holiness, and Joy (6:3-7:16)
9. Generosity Modeled and Encouraged (8:1-9:5)
10. Sowing Generously (9:6-15)
11. Paul's Defense of His Ministry (10-11)
12. Paul's Vision, Thorn, and Final Words (12-13)

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

The City of Corinth

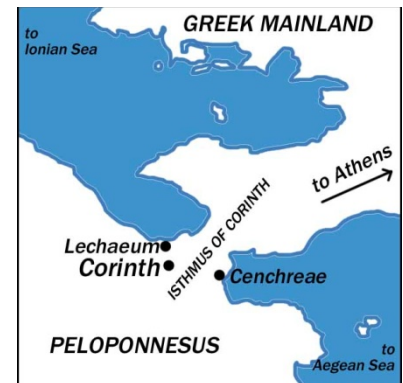
Corinth became prosperous from trade – both the trade moving by sea from east and west, but also north and south between Greece and the Peloponnesus. The port of Cenchreae connected the city to the Aegean Sea to the east, while the port of Lechaenum was on the Ionian Sea.



Temple of Apollo and ruins in Corinth.
Source: BiblePlaces.com

Ruins of the Temple of Apollo, dating to the sixth century BC, can still be seen. Shops and monuments lining the Agora, larger than the Forum in Rome, also persist. At the

peak of the Acro-Corinthian mountain stood the Temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty, where 1,000 female prostitutes served, contributing to the city's reputation for immorality. In fact, the coined Greek word "to Corinthianize" meant to practice immorality and the phrase "Corinthian girl" designated a prostitute.



Tentative Chronology of Paul and the Corinthians (50-56 AD)

Below, I've tried to outline in order what we can piece together of Paul's contacts with the Corinthian church.

1. **First Visit** (50-52 AD). Paul first visited Corinth about 50 AD, during the last phase of his second missionary journey, after starting churches in Macedonia – Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16-17). After leaving Corinth in 52 AD, Paul stops at Ephesus and then returns to Antioch, and from there he goes to Jerusalem (Acts 20:18-22).
2. **"Previous Letter" from Paul**, no longer extant, is written from Ephesus (52 to 55 AD), writes to Corinth rebuking vice and fornication by church members (mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11).
3. **Report to Paul**: Chloe's people report to Paul about the party spirit and quarrels at Corinth.
4. **Letter to Paul**: Stephanas, Fortunatas, and Achaicus carry a letter that reports on problems at Corinth with marriage, divorce, food sacrificed to idols, spiritual gifts, and the collection he was organizing for the Jerusalem believers (1 Corinthians 16:17).
5. **Timothy is dispatched** to Corinth to deal with some of the problems (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10-11).
6. **1 Corinthians Letter** is written in Spring 55 AD, Paul from Ephesus. At this point Paul is planning a soon visit to Macedonia with a stop in Corinth. (1 Corinthians 4:18-21).
7. **Second visit, the "painful visit,"** is a quick trip to deal with troubles in Corinth that were serious enough to require direct personal confrontation (2:1; 13:2). During this visit Paul was personally attacked by one of the members (2:5; 7:12).
8. **The "severe letter"** from Paul (2:3-4), no longer extant, is written from Ephesus, in which Paul professes his love for them and requires them to discipline the man who had led in defying his apostolic authority. Effective in producing repentance (7:8-12).

9. **Proposed visits** don't come to pass (1 Corinthians 16:1-8).
10. **Paul travels to Troas and Macedonia** amidst various afflictions, but meets Titus there and is encouraged by his good report about the Corinthian church (7:5-7).
11. **"Super-Apostles" challenge Paul's authority.**
12. **2 Corinthians Letter:** Paul sends our 2 Corinthians letter from Macedonia about 56 AD.
13. **Third Visit to Corinth** occurs about 57 AD, with the gift collected to relieve the Jerusalem saints (Acts 19:21-22; Romans 15:26). He stays in Corinth three months, escapes to Macedonia to avoid a Jewish plot, meets companions in Troas (Acts 20:1-5), and leaves for Jerusalem where he is arrested.

Paul's Opponents in Corinth

Who are the visitors to Corinth who try to undermine Paul's authority there? Some have supposed them to be "Gnostics of ecstatic temperament and libertine ethics." Others see them as Judaizers. But most likely they are Palestinian Jews, not Judaizers in the Galatian sense, but perhaps men who tried to impose the authority of the mother church over the Christian world.

Situation

To summarize the situation, Paul is writing to a six-year-old church that he founded in 50-51 AD. Since he moved on, the church has encountered problems, particularly some Jewish Christian leaders who have worked to undermine Paul's influence so they could substitute their own. So in 2 Corinthians, Paul writes about 56 AD to restore his relationship with the church and regain his influence, so he can help them with the problems they are having with holiness and hardship, generosity and church order, and their testimony to the non-Christians around them.

1. The God of All Comfort (1:1-11)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7) What kind of comfort do you receive from your faith in God? From your personal daily relationship with God? How might you share the blessing of this kind of comfort with a friend or relative who is currently suffering? What words of comfort can you bring to others?

Q2. (2 Corinthians 1:9-10) How does facing a harrowing crisis help us grow in the Lord? How has a crisis helped your spiritual life? What is the value of learning not to rely on ourselves? What does this do to our pride? How does this improve our effectiveness as God's servants?

Q3. (2 Corinthians 1:10-11) Why does Paul ask people to pray for him? How do the prayers of others have an effect? What happened in your life that has helped you enter into a ministry of intercessory prayer?

Key Verses

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, NIV)

"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who

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raises the dead.” (2 Corinthians 1:8b-9, NIV)

2. Tension with the Corinthians (1:12-2:11)



Map of Achaia, Macedonia, and Asia in Paul's day

Blessings to us from the Holy Spirit:

1. Established
2. Anointed
3. Marked as God's property
4. Guaranteed eternal life

Q1. (2 Corinthians 1:21b-22) According to this verse, what does the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives signify? How does the Spirit unite us with God? What is the promise of future blessing inherent in the Spirit's presence?

Q2. (2 Corinthians 1:24) What does it mean to "lord it over" someone? What is the balance between (1) good, strong leadership, (2) micromanaging, and (3) a complete *laissez-faire* approach to leadership? What are the dangers of an authoritative leadership style? What are the dangers of a weak leadership style?

Q3. (2 Corinthians 2:9) How does obedience to servant leaders help the church of Jesus Christ? How does obedience to self-serving leaders hurt the church? Are you obedient to those whom God has placed over you in the Lord? Why or why not? What is the relationship between obedience and church unity?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 2:10-11) How does Satan take advantage of our unforgiveness? What are the symptoms in our own heart of unforgiveness? According to Matthew 6:14-15, how does holding unforgiveness hurt our spiritual lives? What would you have to do to really let go of your resentment and give it to God?

Key Verses

"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, NIV)

"I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes." (2 Corinthians 2:10b-11, NIV)

3. The Fragrance of Christ's Ministering People (2:12-3:6)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 2:14-16a) In what sense is knowing God fragrant to people who are open to God? In what way is this fragrance repugnant to people who are closed to God? Have you suppressed your "fragrance" because some people are allergic to Christian perfume? If so, how can you regain the fragrance of Christ's gospel?

Q2. (2 Corinthians 3:2-3) In what sense are we "living letters"? In what way can people "read us"? Why is it so important to be authentic, not phony, in our lives? What happens when people "read" something in you that they admire and mention it to you? How might you respond appropriately?

Those in ministry leadership roles should:

1. Know the Scriptures and can interpret them soundly and wisely,
2. Have spiritual gifts for ministry and exercise them with care and wisdom,
3. Are of tested moral character and live a holy life,
4. Have a healthy and growing devotional life,
5. Act properly in terms of money, sex, and power, and
6. Continue in accountability to their elders and peers in the larger Church, so that they don't get off track doctrinally, morally, or spiritually.

Q3. (2 Corinthians 3:4-6) What is the balance between the need for training in ministry (either in the local church or in schools) and personal submission to the Spirit of God? Are you able to "listen to the Spirit's voice" in your own life? Why would this ability be so important in being a competent minister?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 3:6a) Why is a Christian's spiritual health so closely related to his or her involvement in ministry? What are the consequences of dropping out of church – for the believer? For Christ's Kingdom?

Key Verses

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. ¹⁵For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." (2 Corinthians 2:14-15, NIV)

"You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." (2 Corinthians 3:2-3, NIV)

"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:6, NIV)

4. Being Changed by God's Glory (3:7-18)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 3:7-11) Why did Moses' face glow? Why did he cover it when he was out with the people? Why didn't more people's face glow in Moses' time? What's the difference between the spread of God's glory in Moses' time when compared to our own time?

Q2. (2 Corinthians 3:16-17) Why is the Holy Spirit essential to help people see truth clearly and be able to grasp it? What enables people to come to Christ at all? What kind of freedom does the Spirit give us when we become Christians?

Q3. (2 Corinthians 3:18) Moses glowed by spending time with God on Mt. Sinai, in his tent of meeting, and in the Tabernacle. How can we get a similar glow of the Spirit in our lives? In what way is meditating on Scripture beholding God? Is the low plane of Christianity in our day related to the time we spend in communion with the Lord? What is God leading you to do to increase your glow?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 3:18) Why is character change directly related to time deliberately spent in God's presence? What is the theological word for the process of maturing in Christ? Have you noticed a change in the "degree of glory" you're experiencing now compared to a few years ago? Why or why not?

Key Verses

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17, NIV)

"And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18, NRSV)

5. Treasures in Clay Pots (4:1-18)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 4:1-2) How do questionable ethics and ministry practices hurt the work of Christ? What is Paul's alternative in verse 2b?

Blinded unbelievers

1. The subject is lost people, "unbelievers" (verse 4), "those who are perishing" (verse 3).
2. The culprit is "the god of this age" (John 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:12-13; John 8:44; Ephesians 2:2)
3. Satan's strategy is deception, blinding man's mind.

Fighting blindness

1. We fight with prayer and spiritual weapons (Ephesians 6:10-20) We are open and honest in our own communication (4:2).
2. We declare the good news of Jesus Christ with clarity.
3. We love our unsaved friends intensely.

Q2. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) Since Satan has blinded people's eyes to the truth, is there any hope for them? What strategies must we use to overcome spiritual blindness? How many people are likely to find Christ without intercessory prayer?

Q3. (2 Corinthians 4:7) What truth is Paul seeking to communicate by this analogy of a treasure in a pottery jar? What does the clay jar represent? What does the treasure represent? What's the paradox here?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 4:8-12) How does it encourage you to know that Paul went through tremendous stress and pressure? What effect did these sufferings have on the way people could see Christ in Paul? Why is pain necessary to spiritual growth? How does our pain allow others to assess our authenticity as Christians?

Q5. (2 Corinthians 4:15-18) In what way do problems and physical deterioration help us toward "an eternal weight of glory"? Why is it so easy to focus on temporal matters to the exclusion of eternal things? Why is a focus on eternal things so important to our spiritual growth? What can we do to help shift our focus?

Key Verses

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Corinthians 4:18, NIV)

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7, NIV)

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, NIV)

"We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." (2 Corinthians 4:10, NIV)

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“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” (2 Corinthians 4:16, NIV)

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” (2 Corinthians 4:17, NIV)

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18, NIV)

6. Walking by Faith, Not by Sight (5:1-16)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 5:1-5) In what sense are our bodies like tents? If we were to truly look forward to our “house not made with hands,” how would it affect our daily lives here?

Q2. (2 Corinthians 5:6-8) How do Paul’s words comfort you when you consider your death? What do Christians believe happens when we die? What will happen to us if we die before Christ returns? What will happen to us when Christ returns?

Q3. (2 Corinthians 5:7) What does it mean to walk by faith, not by sight? Why can’t nonbelievers understand this kind of living? What aspects of your life are guided by your senses rather than by your faith? How can you bring a faith perspective into these areas?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 5:10-11a) How does Paul’s mention of the Judgment Seat of Christ fit the context here? How should our belief that we Christians will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ to be judged for our works affect (1) our desire to please him? (2) Our motivation to persuade people to receive Christ?

Key Verses

“Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:6, NIV)

“We live by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7, NIV)

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5: 10, NIV)

“For Christ’s love compels us....” (2 Corinthians 5:14, NIV)

7. A Ministry of Reconciliation (5:17-6:2)

“Creation/creature” is *ktisis*, “the result of a creative act, that which is created.” The New Testament uses several other words to describe this, including:

- Born again/anew/from above (John 3:3, 5; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9; 5:18)
- Made alive, quickened (Ephesians 2:5; John 5:24; 1 John 3:14)
- Regenerated, rebirth (Titus 3:5)
- Washed (1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5)
- Renewed (Ephesians 3:10)
- Sealed (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 5:16-17) What does verse 17 teach us about the nature of a new believer? What changes in a person when he puts his faith in Christ? Why don't old habits disappear immediately if everything has become new?

Q2. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20) How have we humans been reconciled to God? What did God do so that reconciliation could take place? In what sense are you an Ambassador of the Kingdom of God? In what sense are you a Minister of Reconciliation for Jesus Christ?

2 Corinthians 5:21 is one of the clearest statements in the entire Bible of the Doctrine of the Substitutionary Atonement (also known as penal substitution or vicarious atonement). This refers to the Bible teaching that Jesus bore the penalty for our sins and took our place, so we didn't have to die for our own sins. A “substitute,” of course, is “a person or thing that takes the place or function of another.”

Q3. (2 Corinthians 5:21) In what sense did Jesus “become sin” on our behalf? In what sense do we “become righteousness”?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2) If you, then, are called to be an urgent agent of reconciliation, how is this likely to affect your daily life? How will it affect how people perceive you? How will it affect how God perceives you?

Key Verses

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV)

“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:19, NIV)

“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20, NIV)

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV)

“I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2b, NIV)

8. Hardships, Holiness, and Joy (6:3-7:16)

1. God's help in spite of intense hardships (6:3-13)
2. Personal holiness, separation from sinful practices (6:14-7:1)
3. Paul's joy due to Titus' encouraging report (7:2-16)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 6:3-13) Why do you think Paul shares so much about his various struggles with the Corinthians? How does this help them accept his apostleship as authentic? Have you ever complained about what you've had to put up with in your ministry? How does it compare to what Paul faced?

Paul uses five words to describe a close relationship – a closeness that can hurt the believers.

1. "In common" (NIV), "partnership" (NRSV), "fellowship" (KJV) has the basic idea of "sharing, participation."
2. "Fellowship" (NIV, NRSV), "communion" (KJV) is *koinōnia*, "close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship." This refers to a relationship built upon common interests.
3. "Harmony" (NIV), "agreement" (NRSV), "concord" (KJV) is *sympḥōnēsis* (from which get our word "symphony") "a state of shared interests, agreement."
4. "In common" (NIV), "share" (NRSV), "part" (KJV) is *meris*, "share, portion."
5. "Agreement" is from a word that originally meant "a putting together or joint deposit (of votes)," hence, "approval, assent, agreement."

1. God walks among believers (16:16b)
2. Believers are holy themselves (6:17)
3. Believers are God's own special children (6:18)

Q2. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18) What are the reasons Paul gives us – both in his letter and by quoting Old Testament scriptures – that we should live holy lives? What kinds of temptations did the Corinthians face in their notorious city.

Holiness (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:7; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:14-16)

Q3. (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1) What kind of separation is Paul calling the Corinthians to? How can they strike a balance between separating themselves from sinful practices that mess up their spiritual lives while at the same time maintaining friendships with pagan neighbors and co-workers?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 7:5) What are the distinctions between fear, faith, and courage? Why is being honest about our fears better than pretending we don't have any fears? How did Paul deal with his fears?

Key Verses

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.” (2 Corinthians 6:14, NIV)

“For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’” (2 Corinthians 6:16, NIV)

“Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” (2 Corinthians 6:17, NIV)

“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” (2 Corinthians 7:1, NIV)

9. Generosity Modeled and Encouraged (8:1-9:5)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5) Why is it so difficult to give when we are stressed by circumstances and bills and pressures? What can we learn from the example of the Macedonians and the poor widow? How will this lesson affect your own giving?

Giving is referred to as “grace” five places in our text:

	NIV	NRSV	KJV
Verse 4	“privilege”	“privilege”	“gift”
Verse 7	“act of grace”	“generous undertaking”	“grace”
Verse 8	“grace of giving”	“generous undertaking”	“grace”
Verse 9	“grace”	“generous act”	“grace”
Verse 19	“offering”	“generous undertaking”	“grace”

Q2. (2 Corinthians 8:4, 7-9, 19) What does grace have to do with giving? What does giving look like when it isn’t accompanied by grace? What does it look like when grace prompts your giving?

Q3. (2 Corinthians 8:9) What riches did Christ have according to this verse? How did he become poor? In what way were we poor? In what way have we become rich?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 8:21-22) What is the balance between living our lives wholly before God without being men-pleasers, and doing what is right in the sight of men?

Key Verses

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9, NIV)

“For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.” (2 Corinthians 8:21, NIV)

10. Sowing Generously (9:6-15)

“Sparingly” is *pheidomenōs*, “in a scanty or meager manner, sparingly,” from *pheidomai*, “to be miserly.” “Generously” (NIV), “bountifully” (NRSV, KJV) is *eulogia*, “blessing,” which we saw in the previous verse (9:5). Here, the idea is “sowing for blessing.” Since the concept of blessing connotes the idea of bounty, *eulogia* also bears the meaning, “generous gift, bounty.”

1. Principles of Blessing and Tithing (Malachi 3:10-12)
2. The Result of Failing to Put God First in Giving (Haggai 1:2-11)
3. Jesus’ Teaching on Giving and Blessing (Luke 6:37-38)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 9:6) Does the Scripture teach that material blessing results from giving generously to God’s work? Why are we so careful to reinterpret this as referring mainly to spiritual blessing? If you compared your own actual giving to God’s work to a tithe (10%) of your income, would it look generous?

Correctives for the prosperity message (Appendix 2)

1. The assertion that poverty is the curse Christ frees us from (Malachi 3:9; Deuteronomy 27:26; 28:15-68; Galatians 3:13-14; Genesis 3:17b-19a). Jesus wasn’t wealthy (Luke 8:1-3; John 12:6; 13:29).
2. The danger of greed being a primary motivation for giving.
Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19-21, 24)
Desire to become wealthy (1 Timothy 6:6-10)
Do not love the world (1 John 2:15-16)
3. The related danger of pride when one flaunts one’s wealth.

Two wrong motivations for giving:

1. Reluctance. “Reluctantly” (NIV, NRSV), “grudgingly” (KJV) is *lypē*, “pain of mind or spirit, grief, sorrow, affliction,” here, with the preposition *ek*, “out of,” it means “reluctantly.”
2. Pressure. “Under compulsion” (NIV, NRSV), “of necessity” (KJV) is *anankē*, “necessity or constraint as inherent in the nature of things, necessity, pressure of any kind,” a divine dispensation, some hoped-for advantage, custom, duty, etc. Here, “under pressure.”

“Cheerful” is *hilaros*, “pertaining to being full of cheer, cheerful, glad, happy,” here, “one who gives cheerfully, gladly (= without reluctance).”

Q2. (2 Corinthians 9:7) Why do you think pastors or other church leaders use guilt to try to compel people to give more? Can greed be behind their pressure? Why is pressure incompatible with worship? What does cheerfulness while giving say about the condition of a person’s heart?

Q3. (2 Corinthians 9:10-11) According to these verses, what is the purpose of God increasing your “store of seed”? How do greed and generosity differ from each other? What is God’s promise here to generous givers?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 9:12-15) Why should our giving prompt thanksgiving? How is our giving a demonstration of God's grace? Why is God's gift of Jesus termed "surpassing"? Why is God's gift of Jesus termed "indescribable"?

Key Verses

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." (2 Corinthians 9:6, NIV)

"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7, NIV)

"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15, NIV)

11. Paul's Defense of His Ministry (10-11)

Q1. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6) Why does Paul liken his dealing with his opponents in Corinth with reducing a city wall by siege and then taking its citizens captive? Is Paul talking about a victory by the use of incisive logic or is there a spiritual stronghold here, one that derives its power from Satan's kingdom?

Q2. (2 Corinthians 11:1-5) What does it feel like when a congregation loses its pure devotion to Jesus Christ, and instead takes on other motivations for its religious observance? In what ways is this like the church at Ephesus losing its "first love" (Revelation 2:4)? How can this purity of devotion be restored?

Paul was able to refuse financial compensation from the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:12b, 15b, 17-18) because:

1. The Macedonian churches – in particular, Philippi – provided him support and supplied his needs (Philippians 4:15-16)
2. He worked as a tentmaker in Corinth, where he met Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18:2-3). Furthermore, he worked not only in Corinth, but in Ephesus (Acts 20:34), Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8), and perhaps elsewhere, too.

Q3. (2 Corinthians 11:7-9) Why do you think Paul refused to require the Corinthians to support him? How did this help his ministry? How did it contribute to them taking him for granted? How can we honor Christian workers, clergy and lay, who give of their time sacrificially to minister for Christ? How will Christ honor them?

Q4. (2 Corinthians 11:23-28) How do Paul's sufferings help authenticate his claim to be an apostle? What do these sufferings tell us about Paul's commitment? How does this account inspire you – or convict you? How will you be different from having pondered it?

Key Verses

"For the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments ⁵ and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:4-5, NIV)

"Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness." (2 Corinthians 10:14b-15a, NIV)

12. Paul's Vision, Thorn, and Final Words (12-13)

Is Sickness from Satan?

1. Jesus' healing miracles were signs of the Kingdom (Luke 10:9). "Saved" (*sōzō*) is used in the gospels for physical healing sometimes (Matthew 9:21-22; Mark 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 10:52; Luke 8:36, 48, 50; 17:19; 18:42; Acts 4:9; 14:9).
2. Jesus rebuked Satan and evil spirits in order to bring about healing (Luke 4:35, 39, 41; 9:42).
3. Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the sick and to cast out demons (Mark 16:17-18, longer ending; Luke 9:1; 10:9, 17).
4. Healing and works of miracles are gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9-10, 28; 13:10).
5. God didn't heal all sicknesses – even in the apostolic circle (Romans 8:18, 23; 2 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 2:27; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20).
6. A healer's own sickness not incompatible with a powerful healing ministry.

Q1. (2 Corinthians 12:7) *Why* was this "thorn in the flesh" given to Paul? What purpose did God want to achieve through this in Paul's character? How can something be both used by God *and* be caused by Satan's destructive work? How does this verse relate to Romans 8:28 and Genesis 50:20?

Q2. (2 Corinthians 12:10) What was the life-changing lesson that Paul learned from God when God denied his prayer? How does our self-sufficiency limit God's power through our lives? Can we become dependent upon God without having to experience some "thorn in the flesh" ourselves?

Q3. (2 Corinthians 12:20) How do you "cure" a church of these kinds of behaviors and sins? How can a "love offensive" begin to change the spirit of a dysfunctional congregation? What is the role of church discipline in a dysfunctional congregation?

Sexual sins (12:21)

1. "Impurity" (NIV, NRSV), "uncleanness" (KJV) is *akatharsia*, "a state of moral corruption, immorality, vileness," used especially of sexual sins. Addiction to pornography, for example, would fit in this category.
2. "Sexual sin" (NIV), "sexual immorality" (NRSV), "fornication" (KJV) is *porneia*, a generic term referring to "unlawful sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, fornication." This word would also encompass homosexual acts.
3. "Debauchery" (NIV), "licentiousness" (NRSV), "lasciviousness" (KJV) is *aselgeia*, "lack of self-constraint which involves one in conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable, self-abandonment," especially used of sexual excesses.

Q4. (2 Corinthians 13:12) What is the equivalent of a "holy kiss" in *your* congregation and culture? Why is a warm familial greeting so important in a healthy congregation? Why do people sometimes resist being greeted warmly?

Key Verses

“He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’” (2 Corinthians 12:9a, 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.” (2 Corinthians 13:14, NIV)