

2 Corinthians

WEEK TWO

1

II. Change of Plans, Painful Visit, and Severe Letter (1:12-2:13)

2

Chronology of Paul's Relationship with the Corinthians

6. Receives letter from Corinth (Stephanas) and news from Chloe's people of more trouble.
7. Writes **1 Corinthians in response**.
Sends letter with Timothy who returns with bad news. Church in open rebellion contra Paul.
8. Makes a "**painful visit**" with horrific consequences.
Returns to Ephesus (**2:1-4; 13:1**).
9. Writes "**severe letter**" from Ephesus (lost).
Sends letter with Titus and awaits his return.

3

10. Goes to port (Troas) to meet Titus. Sea lanes have closed. Sets out for Macedonia and meets Titus who brings good news. Paul is elated, but not all is well.
11. Writes **2 Corinthians** (4th letter) from Macedonia.
12. Makes **third visit** to Corinth, stays three months. From Corinth, writes Romans (**Rom 16:23**).
13. Leaves for Jerusalem with collection and delegates.

4

Paul's Plans

- The original plan; Paul would visit Corinth on his return to Jerusalem (1 Cor 16).
- When Paul receives news from Timothy that the church was in rebellion, he decides to change his original plan and makes an unexpected visit to address the Corinthians face-to-face; known as the “**painful visit**”.

5

- The second plan; during the “**painful visit**”, Paul promises to return to Corinth as soon as he can and later, another visit on his way home to Jerusalem.
- Paul changes his mind when he gets back to Ephesus. He believes that nothing good could come from another quick visit, so he writes a letter of rebuke known as the “**severe letter**” or as Paul calls it, a “letter in tears”.

The consequences of changing his plans will be catastrophic.

6

Enemies Take Advantage to Slander Paul's Character

Slanders made against Paul:

- **Makes promises he can't keep.**
- **Makes one promise after another.**
- **Says "yes" and "no" in the same breath.**
- **Makes decisions in the flesh.**
- **Can't understand what he writes.**
- **Multiple misfortunes prove a lack of spiritual power.**
- **Paul is not guided by the Holy Spirit.**

Therefore, Paul's accusers say, "If we can't trust Paul, how can we trust his message?"

Paul knows the accusations are pure slander encouraged by the "Super Apostles".

He also knows that he must convince the Corinthians that he and his message can be trusted.

Paul sacrifices his own rights.

This is Our Boast (1:12-14)

¹² Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.

¹³ We do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. I hope that ¹⁴ you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Commentary

The word “boast” was used 25x in 2 Corinthians.

- Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves ... with integrity.**
- We don't make decisions in the flesh (a worldly manner).**
- We don't write things you cannot understand.**
- I hope when you understand fully ...**

Paul's Change of Plans (1:15-22)

15 Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice.

16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea.

17 Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both “Yes, yes” and “No, no”?

11

18 But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” Jesus Christ, who was reached among you by us – was not ‘Yes’ and ‘No’, but in him it has always been ‘Yes’.

20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.

21 Now it is God who makes us stand firm in Christ. He **anointed** us, ²² set his **seal of ownership** on us, and put his **Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.**

12

Commentary

Our message is not “yes” and “no”.
God’s promises are “yes” in Christ.
We are in Christ; through Him we say “Amen”.

Paul adds a theological response:
*Now it is God who makes us 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. (1:21-22)*

13

Painful Visit & Severe Letter (1:23-2:4)

*²³ I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. ¹ So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. ² For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved?
³ I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice.
⁴ I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.*

14

Commentary

1:23 Oath— *as God is my witness, I stake my life ...*

2:1 *I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to spare you from suffering more grief.*

2:3 *I wrote as I did so I would not be distressed by those who should have made me glad.*

(A ringleader launched a vicious personal attack on Paul. Not even Paul's allies came to his defense.)

2:4 *I wrote out of great distress, anguish of heart, and many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.*

Forgive the Offender (2:5-11)

⁵ *If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved you.* ⁶ *The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient.*

⁷ *Now you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*

⁸ *I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.*

¹⁰ *Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. I have forgiven in the sight of Christ ¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.*

Commentary

Discernment and discipline.

The punishment inflicted on the offender by the majority is sufficient. Now ...

- **Forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.**
- **Reaffirm your love for him.**
- **Forgive, so that Satan might not outwit us, for we are not unaware of his schemes.**

Paul Reunites with Titus (2:12-13; 7:5-7)

Now when I went to Troas ... I had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So, I went on to Macedonia ... (2:12-13)

⁵ we had no rest, ⁶ but God comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. (7:5-7)

Commentary

Titus brings great news. The majority of the Corinthians have repented and are aligned with Paul. *“Longing and ardent concern for me, your great sorrow.”* Paul is elated.

Paul’s joy prompts the use of one of his favourite metaphors: Christ’s triumph.

III. Paul, a Minister of the New Covenant (2:14-7:4)

Christ's Triumph (2:14-17)

14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and death to those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?

21

Commentary

- The Roman triumph procession
- Magistrate and senators
- Trumpets and musicians
- Spoils of war: gold, silver, marble, and art
- White oxen for sacrifice and priests shaking censers
- Captives
- General
- Army

To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life ... (2:16) (see Leviticus)

22

Paul and the Peddlers

17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.

The dilemma of Christian Triumphalism.

Letters from Christ (3:1-3)

1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?

2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone.

3 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.

Commentary

Paul's metaphor: Letters written on the heart.

Letters of Recommendation

Common then and now: Good/Useless

“Do I need letters like some people ...”

- **You are our letter written on the heart.**
- **You are letters from Christ—a result of our ministry.**
- **You are known and read by everyone (for good or for bad).**
- **You are living letters written by the Spirit, not written on tablets of stone or with ink.**

Who God Calls, He Equips (3:4-6)

⁴ Such confidence we have through Christ.

⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶ 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.

Commentary

We don't make ourselves "ministers of the gospel".

- Commissioned by God, not by fulfilling a list of requirements.
- God has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code, but by the Spirit who gives life—because by the Spirit, Jesus was raised from the dead.

"And who is equal to such a task?" (2:16)

27

Commentary on Old and New Covenant

The Old Covenant was an expression of God's grace providing concrete instructions as to how God expected His people to live.

The Old Covenant was glorious, but the glory was temporary, serving as a stepping stone to the New Covenant.

Jeremiah prophesied, *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts."* (Jer 31:31ff)

28

The prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant at the Last Supper with his disciples. *“Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:19-20).*

The Lord’s Supper looks back and forward marking the inauguration, continuation, and consummation of the “New Covenant”.

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”. (1 Cor 11:23-26)

Just as the blood of a sacrifice would atone for sins in the OT, the blood of Jesus that was shed—He was raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit—would wash away our sins.

The good news of the gospel is what God has chosen: *“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6)

The Old Covenant was glorious but temporary. The New Covenant was far more glorious and everlasting.

The Greater Glory of the New Covenant (3:7-18)

⁷ Now if the ministry which was engraved in letters on stone (the old covenant) ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious (the new covenant)?

⁹ If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! ¹⁰ For what was glorious has no glory in comparison with the surpassing glory of the new. ¹¹ And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Commentary

Defining “new”.

Paul compares the glory of the New Covenant in Christ to the glory of the Old Covenant under Moses.

The old led to condemnation and death (3:7-9), and the new resulted in righteousness and life (3:6, 9).

The Greater Glory of the New Covenant (3:7-18)(cont'd)

¹² Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away ... to this day the veil has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.

16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Commentary

In contrast to the legalism of the “Super Apostles”, the New Covenant is of the Spirit and the Spirit is the Lord.

Jesus is now present in every heart by the power of the Spirit. With the Spirit within us, we are changed to become more and more like Christ.

Weakness, Strength, & the Glory of God (4:1-6)

¹ Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Commentary

Paul does not lose heart because he ...

- **Is commissioned by God.**
- **Is aware of the great task given to him.**
- **Remembers what God has done for him/Damascus Road experience.**
- **Never forgets the glory that awaits him.**

Accusers continue to slander. They say Paul uses underhanded and deceptive methods that distort the gospel for his own self-interests.

Paul responds:

I don't preach about myself.

I preach plainly so everyone can understand.

I preach Jesus Christ as Lord. ("don't look at me, look at Jesus.")

Those who refuse the gospel have been blinded by the god of this world because they chose it so.

Satan is great at camouflaging.

Our Weakness, God's Strength (4:7-9)

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

Commentary

Power in Weakness: *“We have this treasure in jars of clay, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.”*

Paul contrasts the glory of the treasure with the fragility and ordinariness of its container.

- **Treasure:** The gospel of good news—One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God seen in the face of Christ.
- **Jars of clay:** The human body is vulnerable to injury, disease, decay, and death.
- **Surpassing greatness of the power of God:** The One who raised Jesus from the dead has the power to lift us out and work through our powerlessness.

Paul's Four Paradoxes

Weakness

Pressured on every side

At wits' end

Persecuted (hounded)

Struck down

Strength

but not crushed

but not in despair

but not abandoned

but not destroyed

- For all their **talk about power**, the “Super Apostles” have nothing to say about the realities of life: suffering, sorrow, pain, heartache, sickness, death, and judgment (accountability).
- We appreciate the greatness and power of God when we recognise the certainty of how weak we really are.
- **Human weakness presents no barriers to the purposes of God.** His power is made perfect in our weakness.