

Episode: Paul's Letters Series No. 08

Narrator: Titus

Primary Scriptures: Second Corinthians

Story Summary: Paul's second New Testament letter to the church in Corinth

Location: Roman Empire; Greece, Corinth

Time: AD 30 Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
 AD 48 Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
 AD 50 Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
 AD 53 Start of Third Missionary Journey
 AD 56 Paul writes *1 Corinthians*, *2 Corinthians*

Suggested Memory Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 2:14; 4:16-18; 5:10, 17, 20-21; 6:14; 9:6-7; 10:4-5; 12:9

In *Second Corinthians*, Paul seemingly jumps from topic to topic, but there are three main themes. First, Paul defends his apostleship and his authority. In this letter, Paul also makes a passionate plea for the Corinthians to commit to their relationship with him. Their relationship was strained by his previous letters criticizing their behavior, and possibly by a previous visit that didn't go well.

Next, Paul calls on them to be generous, especially in their giving toward the big relief fund Paul is raising for the Jerusalem church. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul lays out many valuable principles about giving, especially giving to other churches and Christians in need.

Third, much of the letter is about reconciliation, especially in two areas: among the Corinthians themselves, and between God and mankind. *First Corinthians* exposed many of the problems of the Corinthian church. Although some of those were corrected by the time of *Second Corinthians*, they still had a list of improvements they needed to make.

In 2 Corinthians 4-5, Paul gives tantalizing information about the eternal rewards of being faithful to God. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, he makes it clear that eternal rewards are far more valuable and important than the rewards of this world, that heavenly homes are eternal.

If you go to Corinth today, there is a famous platform in the middle of the city. It is known as the *Bema*, or judgment seat. It was where official proclamations were made, or where citizens stood to be judged by officials. Several of these Bema seats are mentioned in the Bible: when Pilate tried Jesus in Jerusalem; when Agrippa made a speech before it in Caesarea before being struck down with worms and where Paul was tried before Festus; and this one in Corinth where Paul was tried before Gallio. This is possibly what Paul had in mind when he cautioned the Corinthians: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10)

Discussion Questions:

1. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-9, Paul goes into great detail about the trials he is facing. Why did he do that? Would 2 Corinthians 1:10-11 have been enough to change his discouraging news to encouraging news?
2. 2 Corinthians 4:15 is another verse showing that the overall purpose of the gospel is that God is glorified. Thanksgiving is one action that glorifies. What are some other ways you can live out this gospel purpose of glorification?
3. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says all will appear before Christ and be judged for the good and bad things they did. How does that verse fit with your thoughts on forgiveness, grace, and salvation?
4. What is the “grace of giving” in which Paul encourages the Corinthians to excel? If it is generosity, how can you excel in being generous?
5. How big of a problem is false teaching based on 2 Corinthians 10-11? Do you think Paul had difficulty convincing the Corinthians they should believe him instead of other teachers who disagreed with him?

Application Questions:

1. According to 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, the Corinthians themselves were representing Paul and Christ, letters read by everybody. Do you feel like you are a letter from Christ and your church leaders that is read by everybody? Are you pleased with the message that your life sends to those who read your “letter”?
2. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 are well-known verses that explain a way Paul stayed faithful through the years. In those verses, what is Paul’s antidote to suffering? What does Paul mean by unseen things?
3. Does 2 Corinthians 6:14 apply to your business relationships? Friendships? Family relationships? How does that verse fit with your obligation to share the Gospel with unbelievers?
4. 2 Corinthians 11:14 says Satan masquerades as an angel of light. How can you determine whether the things you believe are from God and not from Satan?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says the god of this world (Satan) blinds the minds of unbelievers so they cannot understand the gospel. Does this explain why you can read the Bible and believe it, while your friends are not able to understand it or believe it? Are you willing to pray that God opens the eyes of your friends so they can believe?
2. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says we are ambassadors of Christ. What are the responsibilities of an ambassador of the United States? What aspects of those responsibilities does an ambassador of Christ share?
3. 2 Corinthians 12:7 says Paul was given a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him from being conceited. The Lord told him the thorn was to show God’s power is made perfect in weakness. What weaknesses do you have that God can use to demonstrate his power?