

## 2 Corinthians 2:1 - 3:4

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### Day 1

#### Paul's Change of Plans. Read 2 Corinthians 2:1-4

1. Besides wanting to spare the Corinthians (1:23) what is another reason Paul didn't want to go back to Corinth? 2:1,2 (See 12:21)

**FYI:** "Paul knew that another painful visit would not be good for him. The constant conflict with the Corinthian Christians could really damage his relationship with them."  
- David Guzik

"We see that even for the great apostle, it is painful to be criticized and misunderstood. When we feel misjudged, we are tempted to retaliate. But Paul has shown us a godly response to being misjudged: We examine ourselves to see if there is an validity to the criticism. (1:12). If not, we explain what happened as clearly and simply as we can. If anything painful must be said, we minimize the pain by affirming our love for the individual and our commitment to the relationship."  
- Ray Stedman (282)

2. Why did Paul choose to write them instead of another visit? 2:3 i.e. What did he want to take place before he came back?

**FYI:** "Paul wanted to spare them sorrow. Apparently he had written them an additional letter after 1 Corinthians ...On the heels of that letter, Paul didn't want to come and stir up the sorrow his letter had created. He wanted to wait until the matter was resolved and the church was joyful again. His words are those of a loving shepherd, not a self-serving tyrant."  
- Charles Swindoll (26)

"Paul wisely understood that considering all the circumstances, a letter was better than a personal visit. A letter could show Paul's heart, yet not give as much opportunity for the deterioration of their relationship. It would give them room to repent and get right with God and Paul again."  
- David Guzik

"You probably can relate to the sadness and frustration of trying to reconcile a difficult relationship when nothing seems to be working. Sometimes you just need distance."  
- Kelly Minter (24)

3. List the phrases Paul used to describe his state when writing. 2:4a What impression does this give you of Paul and his relationship with other believers?

- What was and wasn't his goal in writing? 2:4b

**FYI:** "Some good scholars see the "sorrowful letter" as 1 Corinthians, but it seems better to think of it as another letter that we don't have. Does this mean that something is missing from our Bibles? Not at all. Not every letter that Paul wrote was inspired Scripture for all God's people in all ages. We can trust that what Paul wrote in the missing letter was perfect for the Corinthian Christians at that time, but not perfect for us; otherwise, God would have preserved it."  
- David Guzik

4. From the following how would you describe Paul's heart toward those he ministered to?

- Philippians 1:8
- 1 Thessalonians 2:6-8

5. What kind of maturity would it have taken on the Corinthians part to receive correction? *What would they need to recognize about Paul or admit about themselves?*

- By his defense against apparent accusations of being shrewd/manipulative (1:12,13), fickle (1:17), and overbearing (1:24); what does Paul's example say about the care and effort we should take in confronting wrong or correcting misunderstanding?

6. Underline the warnings and consequences of quarrelling and divisiveness among believers.

- Romans 16:17-18 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. NIV
- Galatians 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. NIV
- Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. NIV
- 2 Timothy 2:16-17,23 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. 17 Their teaching will spread like gangrene...23 But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. NAS
- James 4:1-2 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. NIV

**Applying the Word:** *How do you respond to correction from someone who you know loves you and has your best in mind? What understanding, focus or assurance helps you to receive correction?*

## Day 2

Forgiving and Restoring. Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

7. What issue did Paul focus on next? Who had been affected by it and how? 2:5

**FYI:** "Graciously, Paul does not name the man. Some think this is the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 and others think that this is someone who insulted Paul during or after his painful visit."

"The passage... seems to indicate an offence against the Apostle personally, either in his absence or when he last visited them."  
- Stuart Allen (205)

8. What steps had been taken with this man and what effect had it had? 2:6 (Compare 1 Corinthians 5:1,2,13)

9. List the steps the Corinthians were to take in response to the apparent repentance of persons who had wronged them? 2:7,8

10. What would their response reveal to Paul? 2:9 (Compare 7:12)

**FYI:** "The Corinthian Christians found it easy to err on either extreme, either being too lenient or too harsh... 'Love never slights holiness; but holiness never slays love.' (Morgan)" - David Guzik

11. What did Jesus teach about forgiveness in :

- Matthew 18:21,22
- Luke 17:3,4

12. What is our model and motivation? Ephesians 4:32

13. How did Paul link his forgiveness to theirs? 2:10 (Why did Paul forgive?)

- What example did Paul have in his own life of forgiveness? 1 Timothy 1:12-16

14. Besides hurting the repentant person (2:7b), what dangers does unforgiveness have for those who won't forgive? 2:11

**FYI:** "The word *advantage* means 'overreaching, getting more than is due.' When we don't fully forgive a person who has fully repented, we invite the involvement of Satan. He then steps in and grabs more than his due, benefiting not only from the fall but from the failure to forgive...The goal of discipline is not removal; it's restoration and reconciliation." - Charles Swindoll (32)

"Satan would have been the winner if Paul and the Corinthians had refused to forgive their brother, or if their excessive severity had led him to leave the community. Satan is always scheming to weaken and divide the church and to discourage Christians." - The Africa Bible Commentary (1401)

"This Corinthian man had expressed true sorrow for what he had done, so it was time for the disciplinary process to end. After all, the purpose of church discipline is to bring the offender to that point, so that he can experience recovery and healing. The moment he reaches that point, all sanctions and pressure must cease." - Ray Stedman (286)

15. What else did Paul warn against that can give Satan an opportunity? Ephesians 4:26,27

- How deceiving can these schemes be? 2 Corinthians 11:14
- What is our best defense? Ephesians 6:11-13

**FYI:** "How do we defeat Satan's scheme? By loving and forgiving one another. By healing broken relationships. By letting go of resentment and bitterness. That is how we keep Satan from gaining an advantage over us. That is how we repel his attacks."  
- Ray Stedman (288)

**Applying the Word:** It has been said that *"In order for two people to be in a close relationship, they need to be in a constant state of forgiveness."* When has someone's forgiveness encouraged or restored you?  
*Is there anyone whom you need to forgive? How much does remembering Christ's forgiveness for your sins help? Try praying each day this week for that person.*

### Day 3

Paul's Ministry. 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

16. When Paul first came to Macedonia from Ephesus, what opportunity awaited him? 2:12

- What troubled him? 2:13 What does his response say about the depth of his unrest?
- What eventually happened? 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

17. Why do you think Paul was being so open and vulnerable about his feelings and struggles (see also 1:8; 2:4) with the Corinthians?

**FYI:** "*Troas*, an important seaport and commercial center, and gateway from Asia to Macedonia and Thrace.. Paul had passed through Troas on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:7-12), but did not stay to preach there. He received his "Macedonian call" in a dream and sailed to Macedonia...But now Paul finds "an open door," an expression that Paul uses to indicate receptiveness to the gospel, and so he begins to preach in Troas, establishing a church...He has hoped to find Titus at this possible meeting place. However, still concerned about the report that Titus will bring regarding the situation in Corinth, he sails from Troas to Macedonia where he finds Titus at last (7:5-7)."  
- Dr. Ralph Wilson

"Paul had known Titus even before the apostle first visited Corinth." (see for example Galatians 2:1-3.)  
- Life Change (30)

18. For what two things did Paul thank God? 2:14 (Cross reference 1 Corinthians 15:57; Romans 8:37)

**FYI:** " Paul takes an image from the Roman world, seeing Jesus as the victorious, conquering general in a triumphal parade...Fragrance, in the form of incense, was common at the Roman triumphal parade." - David Guzik

"At the cross, Christ undertook a battle that was not rightly His so that we might share in a triumph that is not rightly ours."  
- Charles Swindoll (37)

"This is my favorite verse in all of Scripture! It's a statement of immense gratitude to God for a powerful and effective ministry. Amazingly, this shout of triumph comes immediately after Paul has confessed his failure, anxiety, and despair...Humanly speaking the apostle's circumstances were discouraging. But spiritually speaking, Paul knew that God was at work and even the difficult circumstances he encountered were brimming with ministry possibilities."  
- Ray Stedman (289)

19. What is the "*fragrance*" believers spread? 2:15 (See also Colossians 1:5-6)

***Digging Deeper***

How had Paul described the different reactions to the gospel in 1 Cor. 1:18,23,24?

- How does this message affect people differently? 2:16a What do you think that means? (See John 3:18-21)

**FYI:** "The "savour" of the burnt offerings, when offered in sincere repentance and faith, was described as a sweet-smelling savour to God (e.g., Genesis 8:21; Leviticus 1:9; Ephesians 5:2). The surrendered life and witness of a Christian (Romans 12:1) is likewise pleasing to God and will be used to bring others also to spiritual life in Christ."  
- Henry Morris

20. What did Paul conclude about being a messenger of the gospel? 2:16b

- How was Paul made adequate to be an apostle? 1 Corinthians 15:9,10

21. How did Paul contrast his preaching to "*many*" others? 2:17 (See Titus 1:11)

- How high a standard and accountability did he give to his message? 2:17b

**FYI:** "The word **peddling** has the idea of 'adulterating' or 'watering down' for gain, and was especially used of a wine seller who watered down the wine for bigger profits."

"**Sincerity** is the ancient Greek word *eilikrineia*, which means "pure" or "transparent." Barclay says, "It may describe something which can bear the test of being held up to the light of the sun and looked at with the sun shining through it." Paul's message and ministry did not have hidden motives or agendas."  
- David Guzik

**as many.** "Even in Paul's day, there already were many false prophets and false teachers, who were corrupting the sincere teaching of God's Word with various elements of paganism. One of Paul's main purposes in writing this epistle was to warn against these compromising teachers."  
- Henry Morris

**Applying the Word:** When have you seen a strong positive or negative reaction to the “aroma/fragrance” of Christ? What do the different reactions to the aroma of Christ say about your ability or responsibility?

## Day 4

### Paul’s Credentials. 2 Corinthians 3:1-4

22. What do the rhetorical questions in 3:1 imply about what Paul’s opponents were saying?

See the credentials that Paul had been proud of before he came to know Christ and how he felt about them afterward.  
Philippians 3:4-9

- What kind of arguments had the Corinthians been entangled in? 1 Corinthians 1:12

**FYI: Commend** “lit., ‘to place together,’ denotes “to introduce one person to another, represent as worthy”  
- Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

“Behind each of the two questions in this verse, both of which expect the answer “No!” stands an actual or expected charge against Paul. Since he had just spoken of the distinctive role of apostles (2:14-16) and of his divine commission and authority (2:17...), some might say, “Paul, once again you are indulging in your notorious habit of self-commendation.” The second assertion, which Paul answers and which was made by some of “the many” who were making a profit out of preaching (2:17), might have run like this: “Since Jerusalem is the fount of Christianity, anyone working outside Jerusalem must be able to give proof of his commission by letters of recommendation...”

“Paul is not here disparaging the use of letters of introduction. Their use had already become established within the Christian world (see Acts 18:27) and Paul himself had sought epistolary credentials...before setting out for the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:2; 22:5). Also he himself gave what amounted to commendatory letters (Rom 16:1, 2; 1Cor 16:3, 10, 11; 2 Cor 8:16-24).”  
- The Expositor’s Bible Commentary

23. What credentials did Paul give? 3:2 Why would this be superior to any written letter?

- List the phrases that describe this letter/epistle in 3:2.

**FYI:** “The Holy Spirit was the ink, writing a message of power and love upon their hearts.” - Ray Stedman (293)

“There was nothing wrong with a letter of commendation written on paper, but how much better to have a *living* letter of commendation! The Christians at Corinth, along with groups of Christians wherever Paul had worked, were Paul’s “living letter” to validate his ministry.”  
- David Guzik

24. How did Paul describe the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 9:1b and 9:2b?

25. What would the phrase “*written on our hearts*” convey to the Corinthians?

- How would Corinthians be “read” by others? (See 1 Thessalonians 1:8)

**FYI:** “The most complimentary letter [Paul] could possibly possess had already been written. Their very lives as men and women “in Christ,” the result of the grace of Christ operative in his ministry, were an eloquent letter all could read. To bring another letter would amount to a personal insult to the Corinthians; it certainly would ignore the past and present work of Christ in their hearts. They themselves were Paul’s testimonial, guaranteeing his apostolic status and authority... Proof of Paul’s genuineness was to be found not in written characters but in human characters.”

- The Expositor’s Bible Commentary

26. Beyond being Paul’s letter (“our letter”) whose letter was it? 3:3a (CR 2:15)

27. List the contrasts that Paul makes in 3:3b.

- “*written not with ink but*
- “*not on tablets of stone but*

- What do these contrasts say about the power and impact of the lives of believers?

28. How else are believers described?

- Matthew 5:13-14 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?...14 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. NIV
- 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? NAS
- Ephesians 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. NIV
- Ephesians 5:8-9 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)NIV

29. In what other ways had God authenticated Paul’s ministry to the Corinthians? 2 Cor. 12:12-13 (See also Romans 15:18,19)

**FYI:** “Many think the main reason God granted the miraculous signs and wonders among the apostles [was] to serve as a ‘letter of commendation’ to their apostolic ministry.”

- David Guzik

30. Why was Paul confident? 3:4 (CR 2:14) (Note how Paul connects “we, Christ”, and “God” with this confidence.)

**Applying the Word:** *If someone had been “reading” you this week, how well would they have been seeing or hearing “a letter from Christ?”*

**Memory Verse:**

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“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.” 2 Corinthians 2:14 NIV