



2 CORINTHIANS 1–6

COMFORT, TRIALS, CHRIST'S ATONEMENT, FAITH

CA. FALL OF A.D. 55

INTRODUCTION

Paul follows the rebuke in his last Epistle to the young Corinthian converts, with this Epistle's outpouring of comfort and love. It must have been healing for both parties. We see Paul's devotion to these saints and how meaningful their relationship was to him. The book of Acts gives the historical background and chronology of the letter (Acts 18–20:3). After three years in Ephesus, Paul ended his mission by traveling farther west across northern Greece. There Titus met up with Paul and shared the news that the Corinthian disciples had humbly and meekly received his chastisement (2 Corinthians 7:5–9). Overjoyed with the news, he immediately wrote to thank them and notify them that he would indeed spend the winter with them in Corinth. Paul sent this letter with Timothy, and Erastus went with Titus back to Corinth to make the needed preparations (Acts 19:21–22).

PURPOSE

Paul wrote to thank most of the saints for meekly receiving his previous rebuke and to encourage others to make the needed correction.

He offers an update on his upcoming visit for the winter months and asks them to co-operate with Titus and the others coming to prepare. The underlying purpose was to encourage them to complete the collection of financial contributions (tithes and offerings) and commend those he has assigned (2 Corinthians 8:16–9:5).

AUDIENCE

Greek and Jewish converts living in the city of Corinth as well as the greater area of Achaia (See introduction to 1 Corinthians 1).

OUTLINE OF 2 CORINTHIANS 1–6

1:1:1–11 OPENING:

1:1–2 Greetings Introduction
1:3–11 Paul offers blessings

1:1:12–9:15 BODY:

1:12–2:4 Paul changed plans but still will visit
2:5–11 Forgive and comfort the offender
2:14–17 Apostles' Service: Knowing Christ
3:1–18 Apostles=Ministers of the New Covenant
4:1–6 Apostles spread Light of Christ
4:7–5:10 Apostles bring life in Christ
5:11–6:2 Apostles' ministry to the world
5:20–9:15 Appeals:
6:3–10 Apostles suffer afflictions, yet rejoice
6:11–7:4 Separate yourself from uncleanness

2 CORINTHIANS 1

Greetings and Comfort

1 Corinthians 1:1–11

2 Corinthians 1:1 “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth and . . . all Achaia” Paul’s standard introduction is found similarly in other Epistles and includes his call from God as an “apostle/*apostolos*/a messenger, envoy, delegate, one commissioned by another to represent him in some way, especially a man sent out by Jesus Christ Himself to preach the Gospel.”¹ Timothy learned the scriptures from his mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois. He became Paul’s “true son in the faith,” and beloved younger companion. Timothy was also included as a co-sender of five other Pauline letters (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; etc.).² They send greetings to all the saints spread across the whole Peloponnesus. (Corinth was the capital city of southern Greece.)

2 Corinthians 1:2 “Grace to you and peace from God” This is Paul’s standard greeting in all the genuine Pauline letters.³ Grace most often refers to a gift or blessing from the Lord, or it can also mean kindness or gratitude.

2 Corinthians 1:3–7 “the Father of mercies . . . who comforteth us in all our tribulation” Paul’s message was that the “comfort/*paraklesis/parakaleo*” that comes from the Spirit. He repeated the same word, either a noun or verb

eight times in these four verses—and nearly thirty more times throughout this Epistle. Yet he also admitted that suffering is part of life. When we suffer for the gospel’s sake, we join Jesus in a sense; “we suffer with him.” Discipleship is not a guarantee of outcomes. The Christian life is not a promise of ease. This makes His comfort all the more needed. The same Greek word is translated as either: consolation, exhortation, and entreaty in the KJV. It can also mean, “to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage.” Exhorting can be a comfort that actively helped the saints endure tribulation. Paul developed this theme of comfort to help the saints, as it had helped him.

2 Corinthians 1:8–11 “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia . . . that we might not rely on ourselves but on God” Paul did not elaborate on the death sentence that he endured in Asia but instead expresses gratitude for God’s comfort through his trial. This may refer to the uproar in Ephesus caused by the silversmith trying to save the worship of Diana and her silver shrines (Acts 19:23–41). Or it may refer to an unrecorded imprisonment in Asia (modern Turkey) where Paul was close to death (also referenced in Philippians 1:19–30). The climax of these verses is Paul’s sincere thanks for the saints’ prayers in his behalf, “you help us by your prayers” (2 Corinthians 1:11, NIV).

Paul’s Change of Plans

2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4

2 Corinthians 1:12–20 “we have conducted ourselves . . . with integrity and godly sincerity. . . I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia” (NIV) Paul had canceled an earlier planned visit to Corinth, which his enemies interpreted as untrustworthy or fickle. He tried to explain that he had to modify his trip under God’s direction. It sounds as if there was some criticism of Paul due to questions of why he had not come as initially hoped. The “yea” and “nay” sections may refer to something in particular, or just a general reaffirming that his intentions have been noble.

2 Corinthians 1:21–22 “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” (NIV) God’s anointing is even more meaningful as we think of Jesus as the Messiah or “Anointed One.” His shared anointing can be sealed through the Holy Spirit of Promise. These verses have extra meaning to those familiar with the use of “Holy Spirit of Promise”



Map of Greece with Corinth.

in the restoration.⁴ Joseph Smith learned through revelation that “the Holy Spirit of Promise,” as referenced in Ephesians 1:16, can seal worthy saints through special temple ordinances (D&C 124:124; 132:18–26). Initially, the seal is conditionally received in temples and depends on one’s level of discipleship. After a period of testing, the seal can become permanent through another ordinance performed by a prophet. It is called a second anointing, or one’s calling and election made sure (D&C 132:18–19). Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “To seal is to *ratify*, to *justify*, or to *approve*. Thus, an act which is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise is one which is ratified by the Holy Ghost; it is one which is approved by the Lord; and the person who has taken the obligation upon himself is justified by the Spirit.”⁵ Like Christ, who is the Anointed One, God established an opportunity for the saints to also be anointed and sealed through the Holy Spirit of Promise—which in the KJV is called the “earnest of the Spirit” (and again in 2 Corinthians 5:5 and Ephesians 1:13–14).

2 Corinthians 1:23–24 “. . . it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth . . . we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm” (NIV) Paul’s delay gave them time to repent, “to spare you,” and strengthen their faith to stand accountable before the Lord and His apostolic servant.

2 CORINTHIANS 2

2 Corinthians 2:1–4 “I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you . . . For through many tears I wrote you . . . not to grieve you but to let you know how much I love you” (BSB) Paul’s feelings were intertwined with great love for the Corinthian saints. He wrote a harsh rebuke because he “had confidence in all of [them]” to change (BSB).

Forgiveness for Those Who Offend Us

2 Corinthians 2:5–11

2 Corinthians 2:5–8 “if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me but all of you—to some degree . . . you ought to forgive and comfort him . . . reaffirm your love for him” (BSB) Paul acknowledged how miserable it must have felt to receive a scolding or public spanking in his last letter. (This may refer specifically to the man who committed incest addressed in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5.) Once the offenders felt remorse, he asked the saints to freely forgive the prodigals with open arms of comfort and hearts of love. Paul continued to blend encouragement with discipline in this letter.

2 Corinthians 2:9–11 “My purpose in writing you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything . . . I have forgiven it in the presence of Christ for your sake” Following Christ and taking upon His name requires that we try to be obedient in all that He asks. We are tested to see if we can obey even when it is hard. The tests are sometimes just part of the opposition of life, and other times tailor-made. All of them are

to help us grow to become more Christlike. The purpose of life is to progress to become more like our Lord, so obedience is helpful. Paul also hoped to counter Satan’s regular use of despair and feelings of irreconcilable sin. There is another way back to God through repentance (Alma 36:17–20; 3 Nephi 9:22; etc.).

Triumph in Christ

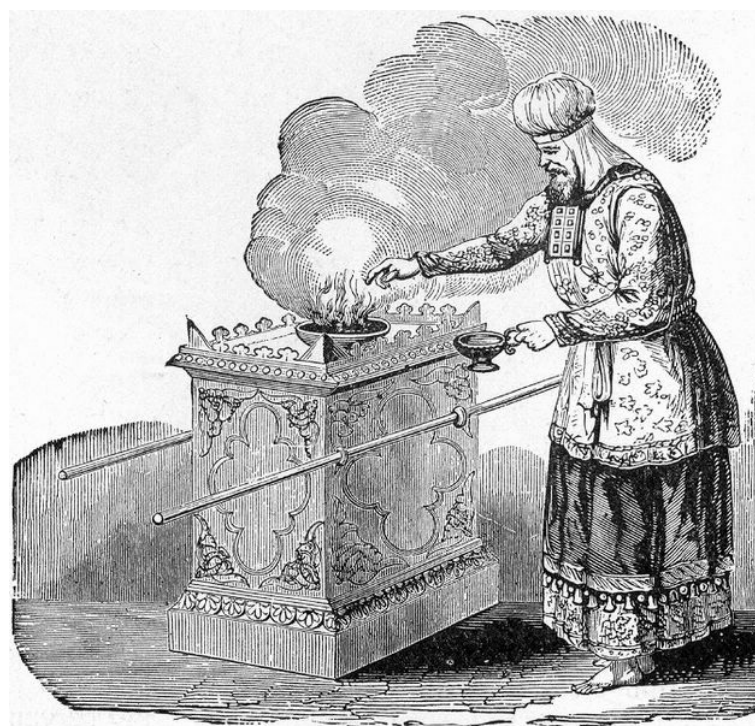
2 Corinthians 2:12–16

2 Corinthians 2:12–13 “when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord” As mentioned previously, Christ’s “gospel,” is the word for “good news” or “message of happiness,” made possible through Jesus’ atonement. The concept is similar to Alma 42:8, “the great plan of happiness.” As Paul presented the Good News, the Lord opened doors to him—just as He does for all who gather His sheep. Troas is mentioned in seven different verses, and meant, “the land of Troy.” It was a major port and center for Christians in the area. (Now it is in northwest Turkey.) Paul hoped to meet Titus in Troas, but as he had not arrived yet, Paul continued farther west and met up with him in Macedonia (2 Corinthians 7:5).

2 Corinthians 2:14–16 “thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (NKJV) The traditional procession of a triumphant general who parades at the head of his army after a victorious campaign, evokes an image of the Lord triumphantly leading his saints.⁶ The disciples have the blessing and responsibility of spreading the sweet fragrance of the gospel message to the world.

2 Corinthians 2:15–16 “For we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God” Paul’s imagery of “sweet savour” referred to an honorable sacrifice; in the Old Testament, we find it in forty-seven verses, always referring to the good fragrance of a sincere animal sacrifice. In the New Testament, Paul used it three times—here, in Ephesians 5:2, and Philippians 4:18—referring to the Old Testament (i.e. Gen 8:21; Exodus 29:18; etc.). Jesus and the apostles taught the need for a different type of sacrifice:

- “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13).
- “I sacrifice my life for the sheep” (John 10:15).



High priest offering fragrant frankincense on the altar. Illustration from Henry Davenport Northrop, “Treasures of the Bible,” 1894. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

- “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1).
- “If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all” (Philip 2:17).
- “Ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20).

The sacrifice of our will—for the Lord’s will—has always been God’s desire. Yet, it was not until we had the example of Jesus that it was entirely understood. In the words of Elder Bruce C. Hafen:

The Savior’s perfect submission to the Eternal Father is the very essence of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Christ’s example teaches us that a broken heart is an eternal attribute of godliness. When our hearts are broken, we are completely open to the Spirit of God and recognize our dependence on Him for all that we have and all that we are. The sacrifice so entailed is a sacrifice of pride in all its forms. Like malleable clay in the hands of a skilled potter, the brokenhearted can be molded and shaped in the hands of the Master.⁷

When humility and obedience combine in doing the Lord’s work, Paul described it as a sacrifice for God having a sweet fragrance.

2 CORINTHIANS 3

Ministers of the New Covenant

2 Corinthians 3:1–6

2 Corinthians 3:1–3a “Do we need . . . letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, inscribed on our hearts” (BSB) Paul’s question sounds as if some Corinthians wanted a “letter of recommendation” from him to prove that he was indeed an apostle, or perhaps to prove his love. This may have stemmed from the harshness of his rebuke, or perhaps the schisms mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3:4. He used an ironic tone that may mean some enemies had come to Corinth and challenged his authority or ethics. Unlike common letters used to introduce himself, Paul felt that the clearest sign of his work and apostleship was the fruits of his labors. Basically, he asks them, “Why do you want a written document when you can look at my fruits? You as converts received a witness of the Spirit, which is a far greater witness than a piece of paper and ink.” Paul testified confidently of the Spirit, because he trusted in God.

2 Corinthians 3:3b–4 “not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” The stone tablets given to Moses on Sinai were not as meaningful as the witness of the Spirit that can be recorded in one’s heart.

2 Corinthians 3:5 “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God” (NIV) Paul testified that he was not boasting or being prideful. Rather his “sufficiency” (KJV) or “adequacy” (NASB) was a sign of his faith in God.

Paul conquered all challenges as a Christian and throughout his apostolic missions with the courage and strength that grew from his confidence in God. He trusted that the Christ had called him to do the work, and that God would assist in His work.

2 Corinthians 3:6 “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament . . . for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” As a minister, Paul served the covenant.” The new “testament/*diatheke*” has the meaning, “a covenant between two parties, a will, or testament.” The KJV translates “*diatheke*” to covenant (20 times) and testament (13 times). The Greeks used *diatheke* as a legal term for a compact or covenant. In the Old Testament *diatheke* represented God’s covenant with people like Noah and Israel. Now it is Jesus’ covenant.⁸

The Glory of the New Covenant: Not on Stone, But in Our Heart

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

2 Corinthians 3:7-12 “if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!” (NIV) Paul repeated this idea of comparing the lower law given by Moses that was only the transitory means to an end, to the Savior’s glorious high law that is transmitted by His Spirit three times. The greatness of the higher law gave Paul and fellow Christians a new level of undaunted determination; “since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech” (NKJV).

2 Corinthians 3:13 “We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing” (BSB) Paul made another reference to a story from the Law of Moses. He referred to Exodus 34:30-35, when Moses spent 40 days fasting and received the tablets of stone. Moses’ face shown so brightly that he had to cover it so that the people were not blinded (even though it was already fading when they saw him). In other words, Paul asked of the Christians, “Let the Spirit of God stream from your faces now that you have the new covenant with the Spirit of God.”



Moses Forbids the People to Follow Him by James Tissot, 1904.

2 Corinthians 3:14–16 “the same veil remains at the reading of the old covenant. It has not been lifted, because only in Christ can it be removed” (BSB) Paul continued with the same analogy. He felt that the Jews figuratively covered their hearts and minds, which kept them from a spiritual witness of the new covenant or testament. He assured them that someday when they turned to God, they would see clearly.

2 Corinthians 3:17 –18 “where the Spirit of *the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into His image with intensifying glory*” (BSB) Paul concluded this beautiful thought with his testimony that the Spirit of God provides freedom from sin and death, to growing glory. Different translations of these verses can seem to mix up the Holy Spirit and Jesus. In the restoration we know that all three work together for the same purpose: “this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The Spirit is the cleansing agent that transfers the Redeemer’s atoning sacrifice to repentant mortals. Also, in this light, we also can see a reference to different kingdoms of glory, just as Paul did later in the same Epistle (2 Corinthians 12:2).

2 CORINTHIANS 4

Divine Treasure Received in Our Earthly Vessels

2 Corinthians 4:1–7

2 Corinthians 4:1 “Since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart” (NIV) Paul’s source of encouragement is God’s mercy. Specifically, at this time, he was encouraged by the mercy God gave the Corinthian saints to repent. When they listened and acted, Paul’s ministering through chastisement actually worked to bring them up. Paul returned to this same theme again in verse 16 after he digresses to discuss our mortal state.

2 Corinthians 4:2 “by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (NIV) Paul and the other missionaries or apostles (as “we”), have nothing to do with dishonesty or the craftiness of men. He renounces “secret and shameful ways” (NIV). Specifically, he does not tamper with, falsify, or water down the word of God that Jesus entrusted to His apostles. Paul asked his audience to use their own conscience to honestly judge if Paul taught the truth.

The doctrine that each person has received the ability to judge between truth and error is taught even more clearly in the Book of Mormon in Moroni 7:7–10.

I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge

it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil . . . the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ.

Earlier in the Book of Mormon, Lehi taught that Christ's redemption empowered each person to be "free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon" (2 Nephi 2:16, also see 2:26). The text explains that wrong choices are made because evil forces detour and cloud one's judgment (2 Nephi 2:11, 17–18, 27). Nevertheless, God gave each accountable human the innate agency to judge and the ability to act correctly through 1) Christ's atonement overcoming the Fall, and 2) the Spirit of Christ that enlightens judgment.

2 Corinthians 4:3 "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" The word "*hid*" in Greek is "*veil*." Unlike the Jewish Temple where the mercy seat or throne of God was veiled in the Holy of Holies, Christians do not need to seek God in a veiled room. Christians may worship a living God exemplified by the life and mission of His Son. Paul preached in an open and honest manner, not "veiled" with hidden meanings.

2 Corinthians 4:4 "the god of this world hath blinded the minds" One of the titles for Satan is "the god of this world." This is the only reference in the Bible with this exact title, but the message was taught by John the Beloved over and over as "prince of this world" and other similar phrases (John 12:31; also see John 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19; and Ephesians 6:12). Paul taught that Satan can veil peoples' minds from the truth. The Deceiver blinds minds so they cannot see or feel truth, but Jesus' spirit removes that blindness and frees us from the power of the Destroyer. Satan intervenes if one does not believe. The key to seeing spiritual things is believing (D&C 5:16). Satan has less power over those who believe in Christ, and keep His covenants because the Spirit can become a protection, like spiritual armor, against Satan's counterfeits. Christ's glorious light that blinded Paul on the road to Damascus, has since radiated from his words and countenance to help convert the meek into believers. After converts have experienced that glorious witness, we must strive to receive the Savior's image on our countenances (Alma 5:14, 19).

2 Corinthians 4:5 "we do not preach ourselves, but rather Jesus the Messiah as Lord, and ourselves as merely your servants for Jesus' sake" (ISV) The subject of the missionaries' message, and of the gospel is Jesus the Messiah. Paul did not promote himself. Rather, he tried to act as Jesus' "servant/slave/bondsman/*doulos*." This is also the message of Psalm 115:1.

2 Corinthians 4:6 "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts . . . [and] displayed in the face of Christ" (NIV) Paul returned to the creation theme from Genesis 1:3 when the earth was dark and the Creator brought forth light. Likewise, when we are in spiritual darkness, He can bring light to shine in our hearts. When one feels the Spirit of God, one does not harbor darkness. The light of the



Photo by Daniel Smith.

“*earthen vessels,*” or in our earthly bodies made from clay or soil, we can experience the treasure of God’s light (Genesis 2:7). The KJV, “excellency” is also translated “transcendent, surpassing, overwhelming.”

gospel may be experienced by believing in God. Often in the scriptures, the knowledge of God, or to “know God” is to see His face. Paul received that knowledge (Acts 22:11). This knowledge is promised by God to all who “forsaketh his sins, and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face, and know that I am” (D&C 93:1).

2 Corinthians 4:7 “We are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored. The real power comes from God and not from us” (CEV) We do not have to wait until we are in the presence of God to know of this light. Even in our

Suffering Produces Perseverance

2 Corinthians 4:8-13

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 “we are perplexed, but not in despair” Paul admitted that even with his sure knowledge of the glory of God, his work as an apostle was still hard. His four examples show how the glorious light of the gospel in his life has lifted him up and helped carry his burden. With God’s Spirit helping, his troubles did not overwhelm him, nor lead him to despair. Paul spoke of his persecution, but with the hope of one supported by God through all the trials. He discusses the need for trials in Romans 5:3, “we know that they help us develop endurance” (NLT, also see 1 Peter 1:7; 4:13; James 1:12).

2 Corinthians 4:10-12 “we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body” (NIV) Paul’s service as an “apostle/one sent,” took a heavy toll on his physical body over the years. In order to testify of Jesus, Paul endured repeated physical torture. Later in the letter he lists how many times he was whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and in danger (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Yet, simultaneously, he experienced God’s miraculous gift of healing. In addition to the dangers, Paul wore out his body in the work of the Kingdom in hopes of helping more to receive Eternal Life.

Although, disciples now are rarely stoned and tortured, we will be asked to follow or obey even when it requires a sacrifice. As we manifest Christ in our bodies, we treat others with charity, maintain attitudes full of hope and faith, carefully fulfill responsibilities, accept setbacks, and stand up for truth in spite of physical and emotional challenges.

Sustained by Hope of Heaven

1 Corinthians 4:13-18

2 Corinthians 4:13 “Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, **“I believed and therefore I spoke”** Paul paraphrases Psalms 116:10. He attributed his belief as his motivation to keep preaching. Even though he does not name it here, elsewhere he attributed the Spirit’s witness and continual promptings as the source of his belief (i.e. Romans 9:1; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Timothy 1:14; etc.).

2 Corinthians 4:14 “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself” (NIV) The theme of the resurrection dominates Paul’s witness. He hopes to share that glorious experience with the Christian disciples.

2 Corinthians 4:15 “So that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow” (NIV) Paul re-emphasizes his point from verse 12. He was motivated to work night and day for their sakes, in hopes that they may join him in glorifying God in the resurrection. When Christians realize their abundant grace from God, they too give thanks and glorify God.

2 Corinthians 4:16 “We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (NIV) Missionary work, especially Paul’s style, is taxing physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Even though his body is aching, God rejuvenated his “*inward man,*” day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:17 “For our light and momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal glory that is far beyond comparison” (BSB) Paul kept an eternal perspective which helped him endure his momentary afflictions (i.e. mortality) in hopes of receiving Eternal rewards.

2 Corinthians 4:18 “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen . . . [or] eternal” (NIV) Paul encouraged his audience to follow his example, to seek delayed gratification. He looked beyond the temporal physical challenges and focused on the eternal matters.

2 CORINTHIANS 5

Sure Hope: The Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:1-6

The next several verses have a lot of conflicting commentary by biblical scholars trying to figure out what Paul meant. We are blessed to have many restored truths that shed light on the doctrine of the resurrection.

2 Corinthians 5:1 “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” Paul used the imagery of the Israelites’ tabernacle (most translations use “tent”), to represent the mortal body. The “*tabernacle*” was temporary, just like our earthly bodies. Yet, God will give us a resurrected eternal body in the resurrection.

2 Corinthians 5:2–3 “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling” (NIV) Paul “groaned” or longed to receive his resurrected body. Before refrigeration, penicillin, modern medicine,

and dental work, pain was a constant problem. Whether it was from a tooth ache or unclean water, most people lived in regular pain. Latter Paul also referred to his, “thorn in the flesh” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

The “clothing” motif continues through the next several verses. Paul hinted to Aaronic priests who received sacred vestments to wear in the temple after they were washed and anointed, and before they performed the sacred sacrificial work at the altar (Exodus 28–29).⁹ Paul then connected the Christian saints to God clothing his saints in resurrected bodies and a “robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10).

2 Corinthians 5:3–4 “being clothed we shall not be found naked . . . but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” The implication is that Paul shrank at being deprived of embodiment of any sort (physical or spiritual).

Adam and Eve were clothed by God with physical clothing and the spiritual covering of the at-one-ment. Adding more significance to their clothing, in the Hebrew Old Testament, “atonement/*kaphar*” means “to cover over, pacify, make propitiation.”¹⁰ The Lord’s at-one-ment allows repentant sons and daughters of Adam and Eve to be clothed in the robes of righteousness. The ancient process of describing the at-one-ment is found in Nephi’s psalm, “O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies!” (2 Nephi 4:33).¹¹ Paul referred to our physical bodies as a burden at times as we “sigh with anxiety” (RSV), but that does not mean we want to be without our bodies (“*unclothed*”), because before the resurrection, the spirits of the dead, long for their bodies. Rather, Paul looked forward to the day when all will be further clothed with heavenly resurrected bodies (“*swallowed up of life*”).

2 Corinthians 5:5 “Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (NIV) God planned for the glorious resurrection before



Photo of Israelite high priest clothing by Daniel Smith.

mortality began. Our assurance of this righteous desire is the “pledge” (BSB), or “earnest” of the Spirit. (KJV) (or perhaps the “holy spirit of promise” (D&C 76:53; 88:3; 124:124; D&C 132:7, 18, 19, 26; Ephesians 1:13).

2 Corinthians 5:6 “knowing that while we are at home in the body we are away from our home with the Lord” (AB) The phrase, “in the body” continues to be equivalent to “in the tent.” This illusion to the tabernacle is consistent with Paul’s earlier teaching that our bodies are temples of God where His Spirit can dwell (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The next phrase in Greek is often translated simply, “away from the Lord,” but then it loses its antithetical meaning of: “‘to leave one’s own country,’ or ‘to go on a long journey.’”¹² Although other Christian faiths do not teach a pre-mortal life as we do (D&C 93:23, 29; Abraham 3:22–23), Paul hinted that we have another home with the Lord, and that we are away from that home while on earth. Paul did not lose heart or get discouraged by the challenges of the physical body, but had “good courage” (ESV) or “confident” (KJV) that this is part of God’s plan while we are away from our Heavenly home.

We Walk by Faith

2 Corinthians 5:7–10

2 Corinthians 5:7 “For we walk by faith, not by sight” Paul referred to the importance of faith in all fourteen of the canonized Epistles affiliated with him. The book of Hebrews has perhaps the best section on faith in the New Testament. The subject of faith has a powerful representation in all four standard works, none perhaps as well-known in modern scripture as Alma 32:28–36, where faith is compared to a growing seed. God designed earth life to require faith, or our spiritual sense, not our five physical senses.

2 Corinthians 5:8 “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (NIV) After the parenthetical of verse seven, Paul returned to his idea of being “*confident*” or of good courage knowing that in a short time, he will lose his physical body to be in the presence of God the Father and His Son again.

2 Corinthians 5:9 “we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him” (NIV) But Paul’s work will not change whether he is with God or working long distance for Him on earth. Paul’s aim is to please God on whatever side of the veil he works.

2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive his due for the things done in the body, whether good or bad” (BSB) The judgment day will come for all of us as we come before Christ, our judge. (Will we stand, kneel, or fall before Him?) All of our actions and mortal desires will be accounted for.

Joseph Smith included this verse while discussing baptisms for the dead in Nauvoo:

He [Jesus] holds the reins of judgment in his hands; he is a wise Lawgiver, and will judge all men, not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men, but “according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil,” or whether these deeds were done in England, America, Spain, Turkey, or India. He will judge them, “not according to what they have not, but according to what they have,” those who have lived without law, will be judged without law, and those who have a law, will be judged by that law. We need not doubt the wisdom and intelligence of the Great Jehovah.¹³

Message of Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:11–21

2 Corinthians 5:11 “We know what it means to respect the Lord, and we encourage everyone to turn to him. God himself knows what we are like . . .” (CEV) Instead of “respect,” the KJV reads, “terror of the Lord” and most other English translations use, “fear of the Lord.” It is not a slavish fear, but rather, by knowing of the judgment day, believers are encouraged to take responsibility; it should motivate believers to live in a way to prepare for it. Paul’s realization of the judgment day motivated him to preach of it boldly. He (and possibly other missionaries included in “we”), act as if they stood before God each day. In a sense, each time disciples partake of the sacrament, it is a judgment day, and requires a transparent, repentant heart.

2 Corinthians 5:12–13 “We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but . . . so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are “out of our mind” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you” (NIV) Some of Paul’s critics thought he was “beside [himself]” or had gone crazy with zeal for the work, but Paul assures them that his efforts are motivated by God. The critics “glory in appearance” (KJV), and were not living in fear of the judgment. Other translations that try to make sense of the last phrase, “right mind,” also read: “being reasonable” (JB), or “of sound mind” (NAS), or “sober” (KJV). But the JST completely changed verse 13.

“We bear record that we are not beside ourselves; for whether we glory, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your sakes” (JST) Paul explained that he worked with a level head for their welfare.

2 Corinthians 5:14a “Christ’s love compels us” (NIV) Christ’s love may be the controlling factor in Paul’s motivation, but not necessarily as some translations suggest because, “Christ controls us” (ESV). This thought came from theologians like Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and John Calvin (1509–1564), who misunderstood agency, predestination, and foreordination. The prophet Joseph clarified this and spent hours discussing: “Unconditional election of individuals to eternal life was not taught by the Apostles. God did elect or predestinate, that all those who would be saved, should be saved in Christ Jesus, and through obedience to the Gospel; but He passes

over no man's sins, ... and if His children will not repent of their sins He will discard them.”¹⁴ Several new scriptures added in the restoration also clarified the importance of agency (Abraham 3:22–23; 2 Nephi 2:15–16, 27; Alma 13:3; D&C 138:53–36; etc.).

2 Corinthians 5:14b–15 “we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died . . . and was raised again” Paul used the hope of the resurrection as incentive for mortals to live by. As Jesus died and was resurrected, so we as Christians now live—not a worldly self-centered existence—but a Christ-centered life. Christ’s disciples are to “walk in newness of Life” (Romans 6:4), or with the hope of the resurrection.

2 Corinthians 5:16 “thou we once lived after the flesh, yet since we have known Christ now henceforth live we no more after the flesh” (JST) When we live after the flesh, we value materialism and things of the world. It usually is in opposition to the role of the Christ/Messiah. Paul and many others expected a conquering Messiah to come soon. The Jews misunderstood who Jesus of Nazareth really was. Not until disciples understood the Christian viewpoint of the gospel did they understand who Jesus was. That knowledge came not after the flesh, or “from a human point of view” (RSV), or “worldly point of view” but from divine inspiration which we call “the spirit of revelation” (D&C 8:2–3).

2 Corinthians 5:17 “if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” Christ brought an entirely new view and meaning to life. Worldly values have no part of his new creation. Jesus tried to explain this to Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

2 Corinthians 5:18–19 “all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” In these two verses there are four forms of the word “reconcile/*katallagé*/restoration to favor, adjustment of a difference, restore.” This is the same Greek word translated as, “atonement,” in Romans 5:11.

Heavenly Father reconciled His plan through the Savior, Jesus of Nazareth in order to satisfy the demands of justice. Jesus’ atoning sacrifice has “*reconciled us to*” God the Father. Our trespasses need not hold us back any longer (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:20).

2 Corinthians 5:20 “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” (NIV) Paul’s use of “*we*” probably refers to the apostles. He defines them as “ambassadors for Christ,” or those who announce their King’s amnesty. An apostle’s message to the saints is from God Himself. He is the one who beseeches them to “reconcile” through repentance and forgiveness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 “He made the *One not having known sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*” (BLB) The second word “*sin*,” may have referred to the “sin offering” from the Hebrew where “*sin/hattat/asam*” referred to in a temple setting (Romans 8:3; Isaiah 53:10).¹⁵ The sacrificial idiom speaks of the at-one-ment of Christ for the sins of men (as the book of Hebrews elaborates). Christ was sinless, but carried our sins.

2 CORINTHIANS 6

Apostolic Entreaty

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

2 Corinthians 6:1 “As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain” (NIV) Paul identified himself as the Lord’s apostle, ambassador (2 Corinthians 1:1; 5:20), servant of Christ (Romans 1:1), and here as one of “God’s fellow workers” (BSB). He repeats his authority to plead with the Corinthian saints to not abandon their faith. The JST footnote clarifies that “him” (KJV) refers to “Christ.” Since 1 Corinthians 3:1, Paul has addressed his authority, and over the next ten verses Paul wraps up his long defense.

2 Corinthians 6:2-3 “At the right time I heard you, and on a day of salvation I helped you.’ Listen, now is really the ‘right time’! Now is the ‘day of salvation!’” (ISV) Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 followed by his interpretation of the ancient text. Similarly, we live at the “right time” when the gospel is in its fullness and the Lord needs servants to gather Israel. All baptized members have signed up for this service, not only Paul and his fellow apostles.

2 Corinthians 6:4-5 “as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles . . .” (NIV). In God’s service, Paul patiently endured many forms of suffering—nine of which are mentioned—arranged in three sets of three.

1. General suffering: afflictions (or troubles, NIV), necessities (or hardships, NIV), and distresses (or calamities, NCB)
2. Suffering endured at the hands of men: stripes (or beatings, BSB), imprisonment, tumults (or riots, NIV)
3. Suffering by self-discipline: labors (demanding work, NIV), watching (or sleeplessness, NASB), fasting.

2 Corinthians 6:6-7 “By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God” Paul’s second list, includes qualities that he had cultivated to better serve God. The NIV translators communicated the second and third traits as “understanding” and “patience” (NIV). These virtues are also listed as gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8-10). Interestingly,

Paul includes the Holy Spirit—which is usually thought of as what fosters all the other virtues. Perhaps he meant that he had learned how to seek and hear the Spirit.

“by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left”

The final virtue mentioned at the end of verse seven uses the military imagery. In fighting soldiers used the right hand to attack with a sword or dagger, and the left to hold their shield in defense.

2 Corinthians 6:8–10 “By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report . . . as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”

Life includes lots of irony. Paul lists nine pairs of the antithesis of his apostolic service: honor and dishonor; good and evil report; truth and deceivers; known and unknown; living and dying; chastened though not killed; sorrow and rejoicing; poor and rich; possessing nothing, yet knowing all things. These opposites may refer to the same experience, but are interpreted through either an earthly or eternal lens. For example, the gospel message was interpreted by some as an evil report, but by believers as the opposite. Those who are financially destitute, but have an active testimony of the Savior and serve him, will possess all things eternally. As a missionary, Paul experienced them all.



Greek hoplite soldier by Amédée Forestier, 1927. Image by Mike Bishop via Flickr.

2 Corinthians 6:11–13 “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians. Our hearts are open wide. It is not our affection, but yours that is restrained. As a fair exchange, I ask you as my children: Open wide your hearts also” (BSB) Paul wrote with a sincere heart and asked the saints to receive and reciprocate his love.

If there was any reticence, it was on their part. This is similar to the Lord’s message to Oliver Cowdery in D&C 6:14, “as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit.” The problem is not the Lord answering, but the receivers hearing and interpreting. Paul asked the saints to “enlarge” their hearts. The KJV referred to their “bowels” as the center of emotion or kindness and pity—like the modern use of, “heart.”

Being an Example

2 Corinthians 6:14–18

2 Corinthians 6:14 “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” Paul briefly interrupts his train of thought with a four-verse tangent to call for separation. Most biblical scholars agree these verses are “disruptive.”¹⁶ They may have been cut and pasted from another Pauline letter, or are not Pauline at all. Eight words are never used elsewhere in the New Testament. And the content contradicts Paul’s earlier advice to the Corinthians

to work out marriage differences if possible and remain together to bless one's unbelieving spouse and keep the children holy (1 Corinthians 7:10–14). However, the advice may refer specifically to the unmarried people who are seeking a spouse. Without more context, it appears to stick out like a sore thumb.

For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? Paul's example of over a decade of service as a missionary to the Gentiles contradicts this statement at its face value. This is another reason why most feel it was added to the text from a different author or different context.

2 Corinthians 6:15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (NIV) *Belial* in Hebrew is the word for perdition or worthlessness, the enemy of God. It was sometimes used to refer to wickedness. Corinthians must cut ties with idolatrous associations. Yet, the idea of superior elitism that underlies these interruptive four verses is confusing as Paul and Jesus repeatedly denounced such prejudices earlier (John 4; Acts 10:34; 1 Corinthians 9:20; etc.).

2 Corinthians 6:16 “what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” Earlier Paul discussed the ideal of disciples' bodies housing the Spirit of God as a temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). Jesus also called himself the Temple (John 2:19). The three Old Testament citations, and one lost scripture that follow defend this idea:

2 Corinthians 6:16b

“I will live with them
and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they will be My people” (BSB)

This citation echoes the Old Testament covenant relationship found in Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 32:38; Ezekiel 37:27.

2 Corinthians 6:17

“Therefore come out from among them
and be separate, says the Lord.
Touch no unclean thing,
and I will receive you.” (BSB)

We can find similar messages in Isaiah 52:11 and Ezekiel 20:34.

2 Corinthians 6:18

“I will be a Father to you,
and you will be My sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.” (BSB)

Although not a clear match, the first line of this quotation is found in 2 Samuel 7:14. The list of three Old Testament citations as evidence for this abrupt rational suggests that the author knew the law. Nowhere in Paul’s writings do we find the phrase, “sons and daughters,” although the Fatherhood of God was well established in Christianity by Jesus. Even though this section against joining with pagans is disruptive, it is found in all the early Greek manuscripts of the Epistle. So either it was added very early, or it was a digression dealing with a specific issue that arose.

As always, whenever we find confusing passages of scripture in the Epistles, it is wise to compare them with the Lord’s teachings, restored scripture, and statements from living prophets. The prophet Joseph Smith taught that not everything in the Bible was accurate in its current form (Article of Faith, #8). I wonder if this passage falls into that category.

Header Image: The remaining Corinthian columns of the Temple of Artemis, Gerasa, Jordan. Photo taken by Carole Raddato in 2017. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Abingdon Press, 1890). All Greek definitions and words in this commentary are used from Strong.
2. Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1:1.
3. Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:3; Philippians 1:2; Philemon 1:3; also in Ephesians 1:2; and slight variation in Colossians 1:2 and 2 Thessalonians 1:2. The authentic Pauline Epistles share vocabulary, style, phrases and themes. The other letters that receive his name, still may have originated by him, but there is less evidence of continuity. However, John L. Hilton's stylometry showed all the Pauline corpus sharing statistical validity except the book of Ephesians. Unpublished study in possession of author.
4. Daniel H. Ludlow, *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (NYC, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 2.651–652. "The Holy Spirit of Promise . . . refers to a specific function of the Holy Ghost. . . [It] is the power by which ordinances and other righteous acts performed on this earth . . . are ratified, validated, and sealed in heaven. . . . The ultimate manifestation of the Holy Spirit of Promise is in connection with having one's Calling and Election made sure—that is, receiving 'the more sure word of prophecy' testifying that an individual is sealed up to Eternal Life (D&C 131:5). The Holy Spirit of Promise validates this blessing or seals it upon the person."
5. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 361.
6. Jose Maria Casciaro, ed., *The Navarre Bible: The Letters of Saint Paul* (NYC, NY: Scepter Publishing, 2000), 295.
7. Bruce C. Hafen, "A Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit," *General Conference*, October 2007.
8. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 134.
9. Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Provo and SLC, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 91–111.
10. In Greek the word, "atonement/*katallagē*" meant to "reconciliation, restoration to favor."
11. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989), 558.559. "In Semitic languages, where one root can have many meanings, the first rule is always to look for the basic or literal meaning of the word, which in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic usually takes us back to early days and simple homely affairs of life in the desert or the countryside. . . . It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out, 'Ana dakhiluka,' meaning 'I am thy suppliant,' whereupon the Lord would place the hem of his robe over the guest's shoulder and declare him under his protection. . . . This puts him under the Lord's protection from all enemies. They embrace in a close hug, as Arab chiefs still do; the Lord makes a place for him and invites him to sit down beside him—they are at-one (2 Nephi 4:33; Alma 5:24)."
12. Victor Paul Furnish, *The Anchor Bible: II Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 272.
13. "Times and Seasons, 15 April 1842," 759, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 28, 2019, <https://www.josephsmith-papers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-april-1842/9>.
14. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2d ed., (SLC, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1949), 4:360. The reformer John Calvin, a French theologian and minister who heavily impacted Protestant thought wrote, "We call predestination God's eternal

decree, by which he determined within himself what he willed to become of each man. . . . Eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.” Victor I. Ezigbo, *Introducing Christian Theologies: Voices from Global Christian Communities, vol 2* (Cambridge, England: Lutterworth Press, 2016), 68.

15. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 340. Furnish disagrees with this hypothesis as he sees no temple setting in the Epistle. Instead, he sees Paul “thinking in a general way of Christ’s identification with sinful humanity.” However, anytime we refer to Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, I think it speaks of a temple setting.
16. *Ibid*, 368.