



Living Scripture with the Corinthians.
Week 23: Considering 2 Corinthians - FAITHFULNESS

1

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for joining us here
LIVE in the
WAJC radio station.

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Intro

We welcome you to this special live stream experience of Chew On This.

You are about to enter a discussion on how to actually live out faith in Christ. Living it out loud within our messy lives. The content of this special discussion comes from The Pastoral Preaching notes and this live, small group discussion these notes will prompt here tonight. Something we call: A Community Based Learning Experience. Come, Chew On This with us.

Opening Question(s):

[Pertains to Subject being discussed. Pulls listener in.]

Introduction:

This is Pr. Orleen Haseltine with Pr. Robin Bjornson and *****
***** (Adjective away!)

Date/Topic:

We thank you for joining us for this week's discussion on Chew On This.

This week's topic _____ is being discussed live tonight, 3/18/2020

Access/Website:

All sermon/discussion, raw notes, and handouts are available at: **NOTES&HANDOUT**
realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/

Discussion

Closing Statement [Gives application of the topic. How do I apply to my life what was just talked about?]



“It is significant that Paul’s expression of these teachings in this letter was inspired by the personal crisis he underwent during his rebuttal suffered on his second visit to Corinth (2:1-4, 9), his desperate escape from Ephesus (1:8-11) and his deep anxiety for the Corinthians experienced at Troas and Macedonia (2:13; 7:5-6) it is no exaggeration to say the coming of these ‘other Jesus’, accompanied as it was by a massive assault on the integrity of Paul, could easily have spelt the end of Pauline Christianity there. **That is survived and continued is probably due, in no small part, to this powerful letter.**” (Pg 17 IVP 2 Cor. BST)

Topics Covered:

Living in Spiritual Warfare – Offensive and Defensive

We already do this, do we notice?

[If we do one topic per week, that brings us through May 6th]

- 1.) God has proved faithful in keeping His ancient promises by His recently inaugurated new covenant of Christ and the Spirit (1:18-20; 3:3-6, 14-18). Moreover, God faithfully delivers and holds on to those who belong to Christ (1:3-11, 22; 4:7-9; 7:6).

Faithfulness: Faithful fulfilling of His promises. They did not expect Jesus to be that. When promises are kept in unusual ways. When faithfulness does not look like faithfulness. When God delivers to the back door.

- 2.) The new covenant, based as it is on the graciousness of God (6:1), has now surpassed and replaced the old covenant (3:7-11). It powerfully meets man’s needs at His points of greatest weakness – in His aging and death (4:16-5:10) and in His alienation from God due to sin (5:14-21).

The New Covenant fulfills the Old Covenant

- 3.) Christ is the pre-existent Son of God (1:19; 8:90, the image of God (4:4), the Lord (4:5), the Judge of all (5:10), the sinless one who died as substitute and representative for all people, God reconciling the world to Himself through Him (5:14-21). 2 Corinthians contains Paul’s most comprehensive statement about the death of Christ (5:14-21).

Christ – 100% God/100% Man.

- 4.) Genuineness of New Testament ministry is not established by ‘letters of recommendation’ or by a would-be minister’s mystical or miraculous powers, but by his faithfulness in persuading and his effectiveness in converting people to the Christian faith (5:11-12; 3:2-3; 10-7). The very existence of the Corinthian congregation was Christ’s living letter of recommendation of Paul’s ministry (3:2-3). The pattern and measure of the minister’s lifestyle is the sacrifice of Christ (4:10-15; 6:1-10; 11:21-33). Establishing true criteria for genuine Christian ministry is one of the major contributions of this letter.

What is genuine Christian Ministry? (Prosperity Gospel? NAR?)

“When you cannot discredit the ministry, discredit the person.” ONH

- 5.) The ‘word of God’, the gospel, has a definable, limited content which neither Ministers nor anybody else may add to or subtract from (4:2; 11:4). This gospel is exceedingly powerful in bringing rebellious humans under the rule of God (4:6; 10:4-5).

How does one ADD or SUBTRACT from Scripture? (Seeker sensitive? Was it subtracting from scripture?)

- 6.) Paul was, both in person and through his writings, the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles. The risen Lord gave Paul this ‘authority’ in His historic commissioning of him on the road to Damascus (10:8; 13:10), and it is still exercised to subsequent generations through his letters, which now form part of the canon of Scripture. This letter is very important because it is Paul’s major defense of his apostleship to his detractors – both ancient and modern. In it, Paul answers the perennial question why he should be regarded as having authority over churches and Christians.

How do we Question Authority appropriately? (Unity & disunity look like what?)

- 7.) Christian giving and serving arise out of and are in response to the graciousness of God displayed towards and in us. Cheerful and generous giving, in all its forms, brings a harvest of great enrichment to the givers (chapters 8-9).

(The Message of 2 Corinthians, Bible Speaks today. Barnett, Paul. IVP 1988. IL, Downers Grove.)

When Giving and Serving are a response to the Love of Christ, not a duty to earn it.



- 1.) God has **proved faithful** in keeping His ancient promises by His recently inaugurated new covenant of Christ and the Spirit (1:18-20; 3:14-18). Moreover, **God faithfully delivers and holds on to those who belong to Christ** (1:3-11, 22; 4:7-9; 7:6).

A.) God's Faithfulness is shown by His promises BEING KEPT = BEING fulfilled in Jesus Christ

2 Corinthians 1:18-20

¹⁸ *As surely as God is faithful, our word to you does not waver between "Yes" and "No."* ¹⁹ **For Jesus Christ, the Son of God, does not waver between "Yes" and "No."** He is the one whom Silas, Timothy, and I preached to you, and as God's ultimate "Yes," he always does what he says. ²⁰ **For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding "Yes!"** And through Christ, our "Amen" (which means "Yes") ascends to God for his glory.

In Christ Jesus *all* God's promises are now being fulfilled; everything is now under his feet (see **Gen. 1:26–28; Ps. 8:6; 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:8**). And as the victorious Davidic king and last Adam, he is supreme, or "head," over creation, for the benefit of his people, the church (*tē ekklēsia*) (Eph. 1:22).¹

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Psalms 8:6 You made Him lord over the works of Your hands; You put everything under His feet

Ephesians 1:22 And He put everything under His feet and appointed Him as head over everything for the church,

1 Peter 3:22 Now that He has gone into heaven, He is at God's right hand with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him.

ASK: Is God keeping His promises to us today? [See Promise Handout]

Faithfulness: Faithful fulfilling of His promises.

- They did not expect Jesus to be that fulfillment.
- When promises are kept in unusual ways how do we respond?
- When faithfulness does not look like faithfulness what is my reaction?
- When God delivers to the back door, do I even notice?

⁸ *We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters,*^[b] *about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it.* ⁹ **In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.** ¹⁰ *And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us.* ¹¹ *And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.*

The Character of God

"Without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Heb. 11:6)—but it is also impossible to have *faith in God* without knowing the *character of God*. Faith is belief in God's promises, which in turn are grounded in his character.

Ways in Which God Reveals Himself

God has revealed himself primarily in four overlapping ways: (1) actions; (2) names; (3) images; and (4) attributes, as seen in the chart.

¹ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2018). *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Second Edition, p. 714). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.



God reveals himself through actions, names, and images because they carry vivid, experiential, creative, and situational power. However, it is God’s attributes that are the fundamental descriptions of who he is.

Means of Revelation	Examples
actions	creating, judging, redeeming
names	“LORD” (Hb. <i>YHWH</i> , or <i>Yahweh</i>) “God Almighty” (Hb. <i>el Shadday</i>) “Master, Lord” (Hb. <i>Adon</i>)
images	Father, Rock, Husband, Shepherd
attributes	holiness, goodness, love, grace, wrath

Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 2510–2515). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

B.) God faithfully delivers us from sin and holds on to us who belong to Christ (1:3-11, 22; 4:7-9; 7:6).

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

God Offers Comfort to All

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴ **He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.** ⁵ For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. ⁶ Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. ⁷ We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us. ⁸ We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters,^[a] about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. ⁹ In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. ¹¹ And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.

- Why do we experience God’s comfort? Vs. 4

⁴ He comforts us in all our troubles **so that we can comfort others.** When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

2 Corinthians 1:22

and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us.

2 Corinthians 4:7-9

⁷ We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. ⁸ We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹ We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.

2 Corinthians 7:6

⁶ But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus.



CLOSING PRAYER:

2 Corinthians 3:14-18

*¹⁴ But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. **And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.** ¹⁵ Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand.*

*¹⁶ **But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.** ¹⁷ **For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.** ¹⁸ So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*

8607

prayer, God's promises concerning

God promises to hear and respond to the prayers of his people, when they pray in the name of his Son and according to his will.

God expects his people to make requests of him in prayer

Mt 7:7-11 pp Lk 11:9-13 *See also* Mt 21:22

God promises to answer prayer in the name of Jesus Christ

Jn 14:13-14; 15:7 *See also* Jn 15:16; 16:23-24

God promises to respond to the prayers of his people in times of need

Ps 91:14-16 *See also* Ps 50:14-15

God promises to hear the prayers of the oppressed

Ps 10:17 *See also* Ex 22:22-23,26-27; Ps 102:19-20; Isa 41:17

God promises to hear the prayers of the truly penitent

2Ch 7:14 *See also* Eze 36:37; Zec 10:6; 13:8-9

God promises to hear the prayers of his obedient people

1Jn 3:22

The need in prayer to have confidence in God's promises

Mk 11:24; 1Jn 5:14 *See also* Mt 18:19²

FAITHFULNESS—dependability, loyalty, and stability particularly as it describes God in His relationship to human believers. The faithfulness of God and His Word is a constant theme in the Bible. It is particularly prominent in Psalms 89 and 119. God is “the faithful God who keeps covenant” (Deut. 7:9) and chooses Israel (Is. 49:7); great is His faithfulness (Lam. 3:23).

It is not surprising that this aspect of God's nature should also belong to the Messiah, who would be clothed with faithfulness (Is. 11:5) and who is described as the Faithful one (Rev. 19:11), the “faithful witness” (Rev. 1:5; 3:14), and the “faithful High Priest” (Heb. 2:17; 3:2).

God's faithfulness is the source of the Christian's deliverance from temptation (1 Cor. 10:13), assurance of salvation (Heb. 10:23), and forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:9). He is faithful to His children because He is first of all faithful to Himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

² Manser, M. H. (2009). *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser.



God's faithfulness should be so deeply reflected in the lives of His people (Gal. 5:22) that they can be called simply "the faithful" (Ps. 31:23). The New Testament speaks of the faithfulness of Paul (1 Cor. 7:25), Abraham (Neh. 9:8), and Moses (Heb. 3:5).

Faithfulness is also expected in Christian believers. Faithfulness to one's fellowman is seen especially in relation to fulfilling an office. A steward must be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:2), just as Daniel and other persons in the Bible exercised their faithfulness toward God (Dan. 6:4; 2 Tim. 2:2).³

See also FAITHFULNESS; HEAL, HEALTH; UNION WITH CHRIST.

Bibliography. H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith*; R. M. Brown, *Is Faith Obsolete?*; G. Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith*; R. M. Hals, *Grace and Faith in the Old Testament*; D. B. Harbuch, *The Dynamics of Belief*; H.-J. Hermisson and E. Lahse, *Faith*; J. G. Machen, *What Is Faith?*

Faithfulness. In the Old Testament, God's faithfulness and covenant love are closely related (Deut. 7:9; Pss. 25:10; 85:10). The most profound example of his faithfulness is the bond between God and the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. In spite of their unfaithfulness, God reminds them that he is betrothed to them in faithfulness (Hos. 2:20).

The Israelites were expected to respond in faithfulness to God because he had acted faithfully to them through the covenant. David and other godly people chose to walk the faithful way—the way of truth (Ps. 119:30). Just as God is both faithful and loving, those who believe in God need to exhibit faithfulness and steadfast love in their lives (Prov. 3:3).

In the New Testament, God also acts in faithfulness: He provides for both good and evil people (Matt. 5:45); he rewards those who do his good will (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18); he provides a way out for believers in the midst of temptation (1 Cor. 10:13); he remains faithful as he fulfills his promises (2 Cor. 1:18–19). Paul reminds us that even when we are faithless God remains faithful because he cannot disown himself (2 Tim. 2:13). John declares that Jesus is the faithful and true witness (Rev. 3:14), the Faithful and True (Rev. 19:11). God remains faithful to New Testament believers, both fulfilling and promising to fulfill the promises of the Old Testament.

Christians, like the Israelites, are to respond to God in faithfulness. Trustworthy servants must prove themselves to be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2). Epaphrus and Tychicus are identified as faithful ministers of Christ (Col. 1:7; 4:7). Paul remains faithful to God in spite of tremendous pressures (1 Tim. 1:12). Timothy is to select teachers who will exhibit faithfulness, one of the outstanding characteristics of Christians. The Spirit of God enables Christians to remain faithful to both God and other believers (Gal. 5:22).

LOUIS GOLDBERG

Bibliography. G. M. Burge, *EDT*, pp. 402–4; M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*; R. E. Nixon, *ZPEB*, 2:479–91; J. B. Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*; J. B. Scott, *TWOT*, 1:51–53.⁴

What Does the Bible Say about Faith?

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Perhaps no other component of the Christian life is more important than faith. We cannot purchase it, sell it or give it to our friends. So what is faith and what role does faith play in the Christian life? The dictionary defines *faith* as "belief in, devotion to, or trust in somebody or something, especially without

³ Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁴ Goldberg, L. (1996). [Faithfulness](#). In *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed., pp. 239–240). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.



logical proof.” It also defines *faith* as “belief in and devotion to God.” The Bible has much more to say about faith and how important it is. In fact, it is so important that, without faith, we have no place with God, and it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is belief in the one, true God without actually seeing Him.

Where does faith come from? Faith is not something we conjure up on our own, nor is it something we are born with, nor is faith a result of diligence in study or pursuit of the spiritual. Ephesians 2:8–9 makes it clear that faith is a gift from God, not because we deserve it, have earned it, or are worthy to have it. It is not from ourselves; it is from God. It is not obtained by our power or our free will. It is simply given to us by God, along with His grace and mercy, according to His holy plan and purpose, and because of that, He gets all the glory.

Why have faith? God designed a way to distinguish between those who belong to Him and those who don’t, and it is called faith. Very simply, we need faith to please God. God tells us that it pleases Him that we believe in Him even though we cannot see Him. A key part of Hebrews 11:6 tells us that “he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” This is not to say that we have faith in God just to get something from Him. However, God loves to bless those who are obedient and faithful. We see a perfect example of this in Luke 7:50. Jesus is engaged in dialog with a sinful woman when He gives us a glimpse of why faith is so rewarding. “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” The woman believed in Jesus Christ by faith, and He rewarded her for it. Finally, faith is what sustains us to the end, knowing that by faith we will be in heaven with God for all eternity. “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8–9).

Examples of faith. Hebrews chapter 11 is known as the “faith chapter” because in it great deeds of faith are described. By faith Abel offered a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord (v. 4); by faith Noah prepared the ark in a time when rain was unknown (v. 7); by faith Abraham left his home and obeyed God’s command to go he knew not where, then willingly offered up his only son (vv. 8–10, 17); by faith Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt (vv. 23–29); by faith Rahab received the spies of Israel and saved her life (v. 31). Many more heroes of the faith are mentioned “who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies” (vv. 33–34). Clearly, the existence of faith is demonstrated by action.

Faith is essential to Christianity. Without demonstrating faith and trust in God, we have no place with Him. We believe in God’s existence by faith. Most people have a vague, disjointed notion of who God is but lack the reverence necessary for His exalted position in their lives. These people lack the true faith needed to have an eternal relationship with the God who loves them. Our faith can falter at times, but because it is the gift of God, given to His children, He provides times of trial and testing in order to prove that our faith is real and to sharpen and strengthen it. This is why James tells us to consider it “pure joy” when we fall into trials, because the testing of our faith produces perseverance and matures us, providing the evidence that our faith is real (James 1:2–4).⁵

1:4 Paul mentioned tribulations (Gk. *thlipsis*, lit. “burdens,” “afflictions,” or “troubles”) nine times in this letter (twice in v. 4; see also v. 8; 2 Cor. 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13) and the corresponding verb three times: “afflicted” (2 Cor. 1:6); “hard pressed” (2 Cor. 4:8); “troubled” (2 Cor. 7:5). Paul experienced numerous troubles as did many because of their allegiance to the gospel. These believers not only endured trials, but they were actually able to derive benefit from them. Difficult experiences forced

⁵ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.



them to focus on the internal rather than the external, and the eternal rather than the temporal (2 Cor. 4:17, 18). They received the comfort of God in time of trial. This consolation enabled them, in turn, to help others through difficult experiences.

1:12 In a previous letter, Paul expressed the hope of visiting Corinth for an extended stay after visiting Macedonia (1 Cor. 16:5–7). However, he modified his original plan and passed quickly through Corinth en route to Macedonia, intending to return for a lengthy visit later. Paul encountered strong opposition and public insult in Corinth and therefore canceled his return visit (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12; 12:21). The Corinthians did not understand the rationale behind Paul’s twice-changed travel plans and accused him of duplicity and fickleness. Paul defended his integrity and explained that his recent conduct was sincere and true to a higher power—being guided not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God. “Sincerity” connotes the idea of being found unstained when examined in sunlight. Paul was not fickle, but reliable. His character would be found pure beneath the searching gaze of God (1 Cor. 4:4, 5).

CONSCIENCE: RIGHT OR WRONG?

Conscience is a universal, innate, God-given capacity to distinguish between right and wrong (Rom. 2:14, 15). It has two functions: to urge an individual to do what is perceived to be right; and subsequently to commend or condemn, depending on whether the individual did what was perceived as right. A person who has a “good” and “pure” conscience consistently and genuinely acts in conformity with an inner set of godly standards (2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9).

Conscience can be distorted, however. While this inner set of standards will be accurate if it is based on biblical truth, the conscience will be unreliable if faulty standards have been consistently presented to it as being true. The old saying, “Let your conscience be your guide,” will only be true if the individual’s conscience has been infused with godly principles. Thus, Christian parents have the important responsibility of communicating accurate standards of right and wrong to their children.

Conscience can also be disabled. For example, it can become insensitive and calloused if the person consistently acts contrary to its standards (Eph. 4:19). Even more seriously, the conscience can become “seared” and of no value through deliberately choosing to believe the lies of deceiving spirits rather than God’s truth (1 Tim. 4:2).

See also 2 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:15; notes on Decision Making (1 Cor. 8); Problem Solving (John 5); Wisdom (James 1)

1:18–20 The Corinthians had accused Paul of being shifty, of saying “yes” and “no” in the same breath. Paul explained that his twice-changed travel plans were associated with the well-being of the Corinthians and not suggestive of a lack of reliability (v. 23). God is faithful, and the message preached by Paul was based on the Person of Jesus Christ, who completely affirms all of God’s promises to His people. “Amen” (v. 20; Heb. and Gk., lit. “let it be so”) was the response of those who accepted the gospel, experiencing security in Christ. Paul’s actions were prompted by God, who was and is completely and totally faithful⁶

⁶ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman’s Study Bible* (2 Co 1:4–18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



FAITHFULNESS

God's faithfulness, Deuteronomy 7:7–9; 1 Corinthians 1:9.
Faithful reading of the law, Joshua 8:35.
Trustworthy promises, 1 Kings 8:56.
Reward to the faithful, 2 Samuel 22:26–27.
Faithful to God's house, Nehemiah 10:39.
Undivided heart, Psalm 86:11.
Proclaiming divine faithfulness, Psalm 89:1.
Trustworthy messenger, Proverbs 25:13.
"Faithfulness is dead," Jeremiah 7:28 (GNB).
Beaten for being faithful, Jeremiah 20:1–2.
Faithful message brings threat of death, Jeremiah 26:1–16.
Imprisoned for faithfulness, Jeremiah 37:1–21.
Faithfulness new each morning, Lamentations 3:23.
Faithful in all circumstances, Daniel 3:17–18 (CEV).
Rewarded faithfulness, Matthew 10:32–33.
Faithful when Christ returns, Mark 13:35–37; 1 Timothy 6:11–16.
Courage, faithfulness, Acts 23:1–5.
"Our first duty," 1 Corinthians 4:2 (CEV).
"You never disappoint," 2 Corinthians 1:7 (CEV).
Faithful without pastoral supervision, Philippians 2:12–13.
Faithful unto death, Philippians 2:25–30; Revelation 2:13.
"I do my share," Colossians 1:24 (NASB).
Partial faithfulness insufficient, Revelation 2:1–6, 13–15.
Holding on to the faith, Revelation 2:25.
Beheaded for faithfulness, Revelation 20:4.⁷

Paul uses chapter 1-2 setting up the upcoming 3rd and last visit he will make to Corinth.

Paul spend chapters 3-6 dealing with this different gospel.

And chapters 10-13 dealing with their assault on his character.

The assault these false prophets throw at Paul, and indirectly the burgeoning Church at Corinth, could have easily resulted in the end of the Corinthian church. It is believed Paul's anointed and raw response was a major contributor to the Church in Corinth surviving.

[IVP The Bible Speaks Today by Paul Barnett]

Key Verses: 2 Corinthians 3:5: "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."

2 Corinthians 3:18: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

⁷ Anderson, K. (1996). *Where to Find It in the Bible*. Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.



2 Corinthians 5:21: “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 10:5: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 13:4: “For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him to serve you.”

CORINTHIANS, SECOND LETTER TO THE Paul’s most personal letter to a congregation. It is emotional and filled with feelings of uncertainty, frustration, sympathy, and relief. This emotional spectrum was due to Paul’s close relationship with the Corinthians. He had planted the church in Corinth, stayed with them for a year and a half (Acts 18:11), visited them a second time, and had written several letters to them prior to 2 Corinthians.

Though it is named 2 Corinthians, this is at least the fourth letter that Paul had written to them. Second Corinthians reflects the tumultuous relationship that Paul had with the church in Corinth. While it is not one of the Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus), it has been called the “pastoral letter *par excellence*” (Harris, “2 Corinthians,” 309).

Many appreciate 2 Corinthians due to its memorable word pictures. Some have been encouraged from Paul’s depiction of “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” (1:3b–4 NIV). Others have been inspired by the picture of the triumphal procession in 2:14 in which Paul and others are led in Christ. Still others have quoted Paul’s words in 3:6, “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life,” while others have gained strength from Paul’s struggle with of his “thorn in the flesh” in chapter 12.

Outline of 2 Corinthians

The book can be outlined in the following manner:

- 1:1–7:16—Paul’s explanation of his apostolic ministry
 - 1:1–11—Introduction
 - 1:1–2—Greeting
 - 1:3–7—Praise to God for divine comfort in great suffering
 - 1:8–11—Deliverance from affliction
 - 1:12–2:11—Explaining the postponement of his visit
 - 1:12–14—Boasting in simplicity and godly sincerity
 - 1:15–22—Replying to charge of changing his mind
 - 1:23–2:4—Cancelled painful visit
 - 2:5–11—Forgiveness for the offender
 - 2:12–3:6—Led in Christ’s Triumphal Procession
 - 2:12–13—Paul’s care and suffering for the Corinthians led to change of plans
 - 2:14–3:6—Paul’s conduct in the ministry is explained
 - 3:7–18—Superior ministry of glory
 - 4:1–18—Confidence despite rejection
 - 4:1–6—Transforming hearts
 - 4:7–12—Suffering displaying God’s glory
 - 4:13–18—Boldness from faith in the unseen
 - 5:1–5—A heavenly dwelling
 - 5:6–10—Hope in the future
 - 5:11–21—The aim to persuade all men
 - 6:1–7:4—Persuading the Corinthians to open their hearts
 - 7:5–16—Joy at the majority of the Corinthians’ repentance
- 8:1–9:15—Paul calls for the collection to be completed
 - 8:1–15—The need for generosity
 - 8:1–6—The Macedonian example
 - 8:7–12—Liberal giving
 - 8:13–15—Aim for equality
 - 8:16–24—The service of Titus and his companions
 - 9:1–15—His confidence that the Corinthians will give generously
- 10:1–13:13—Paul defends his apostolic ministry against the unrepentant minority
 - 10:1–11—Entreating the unrepentant minority
 - 10:12–18—Legitimate boasting
 - 11:1–12:21—Foolish boasting
 - 11:1–9—Fear that the Corinthians are being led into idolatry
 - 11:10–33—Boasting over other supposed apostles
 - 12:1–6—Reluctant boasting in great revelations
 - 12:7–10—The thorn in the flesh
 - 12:11–21—Paul has become a fool in boasting, but the unrepentant have foolishly not responded
 - 13:1–13—A third warning
 - 13:1–6—A final strong warning
 - 13:7–10—Paul’s prayer for the Corinthians
 - 13:11–13—Conclusion and benediction; calls for joy, unity, and peace

Historical Background and Purpose of the Corinthian Epistles

There is a significant historical background that informs the reading of 2 Corinthians. The history between Paul and the Corinthians is largely deduced from information within 1 & 2 Corinthians. Most of this history is constructed from what is contained in the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Consequently the reconstruction of the letter’s background is an uncertain enterprise about which there is not complete agreement.

Graeco-Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth is located in modern-day Greece on the northeast corner of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. The religious, political, and philosophical background of the city are essential for understanding the correspondence



between Paul and the Corinthian church. For more on ancient Corinth, see the section on “Graeco-Roman Corinth” in the article on First Corinthians.

Paul’s History with the Corinthians prior to 2 Corinthians

Paul first visited Corinth in AD 49 during his second missionary journey. Upon his arrival, he attached himself quickly to Aquila and Priscilla. His activities as a tentmaker and preacher are recorded in Acts 18:1–18. The first part of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was both to those who were Jewish, and also to Gentiles who feared God. He was opposed by the Jews in the synagogue and expelled. Still, there was fruit from this activity. Titius Justus and Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed the message (Acts 18:8). The first church meeting may also have met in Titius Justus’ house, also known as Gaius (1 Cor 1:14).

The second phase of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was directed to the Gentiles. Despite his fear, the Lord spoke to him in a vision, encouraging him to continue on preaching in Corinth (Acts 18:9–10). He stayed about 18 months in the city. As a result of his efforts, Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14–15). Within that church were notable people mentioned within the Bible elsewhere, such as: Chloe, Erastus, Tertius, and Stephanas. After the church was founded in AD 51, Paul left for Ephesus.

After Paul left Corinth, he began writing letters to the church that he founded. The first letter that he wrote is lost, but we see evidence of it in 1 Cor 5:9–13. That letter chided the Corinthians for their sexually immoral behavior and forbade them from associating with immoral people.

After he wrote this letter, Paul received a report from Chloe’s household at Corinth. They reported that there was quarreling and factions in the church (1 Cor 1:11). At about the same time, Paul also received a letter from the Corinthians asking for him to give answers concerning marriage and divorce, weak and strong brothers, spiritual gifts, and collections. As a result of this report and these questions, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55 from Ephesus.

Paul’s Painful Visit

Paul returned to his work in Ephesus with the expectation that he would travel to Corinth with the collection (1 Cor 16:5–8) and sent Timothy to visit the Corinthians in the meantime (1 Cor 16:10–11; compare Acts 19:22). When Timothy arrived in Corinth, he found that the problems were much greater than anticipated. These likely came from Paul’s opponents outside of Corinth. As a result, Paul decided to visit Corinth immediately. He would then go on to Macedonia and return for a second visit on his way to Jerusalem (2 Cor 1:15–16). He was expecting that his arrival at Corinth would provide a “second experience of grace” and his sincere conduct would be proved.

Instead of exonerating Paul, this visit turned into what scholars call the “painful visit” (2 Cor 2:1). A group of leaders had infiltrated the church and caused many problems. These people are known as “super apostles.” They were of Jewish origin, liked to boast, and carried with them letters of recommendation (3:1; 11:13–15). They were not apostles in the way that Paul was, proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ, but were more likely agents of others who commissioned them. These super apostles likely were influenced by the surrounding Hellenistic culture. Due to their influence, Paul’s gospel message and authority were called into question. One of the leaders severely criticized Paul himself (2:5–8; 7:8–13; 11:4). It was evident that the gospel ministry in Corinth was in jeopardy.

The “Severe Letter”

Paul left Corinth for Ephesus while the Corinthians revolted against his apostolic authority (1:23–2:5; 7:12). He chose not to retaliate, but instead extended mercy to the Corinthians (1:23–24). This left him open to criticism (1:16–17). Paul decided to send Titus back to Corinth with his next letter. This letter is known as the “severe letter” since it was written “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (2:4 NIV). It has also been called the “letter of tears,” the “tearful letter,” the “sorrowful letter,” or the “painful letter.”

The aim of the severe letter was to embolden the Corinthians to discipline the ones who did wrong, and thus vindicate Paul, the one who suffered the wrong (2:6, 9; 7:12). Another purpose of the letter was to spare the Corinthians and himself from another painful visit (1:23–2:4). The letter also displayed his care for the Corinthians and was designed to test the Corinthians’ obedience to his apostolic ministry (2:4; 2:9). It also was a reminder that Paul was their spiritual father (7:12). After the Corinthians received it, most were repentant (2:5–11; 7:5–16).

There have been six identifications of the severe letter. Three unlikely possibilities include: a letter written before 1 Corinthians and the letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9–13; the “previous letter” mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9, 11; 2



Corinthians (Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 55–56). Other possibilities that demand more attention are: the severe letter is 1 Corinthians, a letter incorporating 2 Cor 10–13, or a lost intermediate letter following the sending of 2 Cor 1–9.

Those who support 1 Corinthians as the “severe letter” do so for three reasons. With all of the great problems within 1 Corinthians, namely, division, immorality, litigation, profaning of the Lord’s Supper, and challenges to Paul’s ministry, it is possible that it caused him much distress. Additionally, the pain expressed in 2 Cor 2:5–11 could be seen from Paul’s discipline of the man caught in incest (1 Cor 5:1–8). Further, the identity of the “one who did wrong” in 2 Cor 7:12 could be connected with the man caught in incest in 1 Cor 5:1 (Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*; Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*; Hughes, *Second Corinthians*; Hyldahl, *Einheit des Zweiten Korintherbriefes*).

However, passages such as 2 Cor 2:6 and 7:12 suggest that the “severe letter” dealt specifically with the punishment of the wrong-doer instead of questions surrounding the entire Corinthian church, which is the concern of 1 Corinthians. Further, 1 Corinthians does not seem to be written in place of another painful visit (compare 1 Cor 4:18–19; 11:34; 16:2–7) as 2 Cor 1:23; 2:1–3 demands. Additionally, in 2 Cor 2:10 Paul offers his personal forgiveness to the individual whom the Corinthians are to forgive, but it is highly doubtful that he would have seen this as a personal injury. Moreover, the passages in 2 Corinthians show no rebuking of sexual immorality but rather a direct confrontation with Paul’s authority (2 Cor 7:12).

Rather than seeing 1 Corinthians as the severe letter, others divide 2 Corinthians into two parts—chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13. In this scenario, 2 Cor 10–13 is called the severe letter, and was written before 2 Cor 1–9 (Hausrath, *Der Vier-Capitelbrief*; Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric*). Some believe that 1–9 intentionally allude to portions of 10–13. However, it is just as likely that 10–13 passage are alluding to 1–9. Furthermore, it is unlikely that 2 Cor 10–13 is the severe letter since there is nothing within these chapters about the punishment of the troublemaker—a key aspect of the severe letter (compare 2 Cor 2:5–9). Finally, the contents of 10–13 do not seem to fit the description of the severe letter, which stemmed from many tears. On the whole, 2 Cor 10–13 is a vigorous self-defense, filled with irony and warnings. Thus, this popular suggestion is unlikely (Harris, *Second Corinthians*).

It is best to see the severe letter as a lost letter; there are other letters from Paul that we do not have (compare 1 Cor 5:9, 11; Col 4:16). If this is the case, the severe letter was written after 1 Corinthians and Paul’s painful visit but before the writing of 2 Corinthians (Semler, *Paraphrasis*; Harris, *Second Corinthians*; Barnett, *Second Corinthians*; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*; Martin, *2 Corinthians*; Murphy-O’Connor, *Second Corinthians*; deSilva, “Measuring Penultimate and Ultimate Reality”; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*).

The “Deadly Peril” and Reunion with Titus

After he sent this letter, several things happened to Paul. He experienced a “deadly peril” such that “he despaired of life.” He felt a “sentence of death” upon him (2 Cor 1:8–10). While some might see this as his encounter with wild beasts or opposition in Ephesus, imprisonment in Asia, or the Demetrius riot of Acts 19:23–41, it was most likely a severe physical illness. Harris sees this from the association of the distress in 2 Cor 1:8 with the thorn of 2 Cor 12:7, as well as factors which would identify the three prayers for removal with distresses in Cilicia (AD 43), Perga (Acts 13:13–14 in AD 47), and in Troas (2 Cor 1:8; 2:12; 7:5 in AD 56; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 164–82; compare Alexander, “St. Paul’s Infirmary”). Whether it was a physical illness or something else, this affliction did cause him to abandon self-sufficiency and trust in God’s power. It also forced him to consider the significance of death for the Christian believer.

Following this severe illness, Paul continued with his gospel ministry. He traveled to Troas, where there was a door open to him, but he found no peace as Titus was not present there (Acts 20:1–11; 2 Cor 2:12–13). So, he left Troas and headed for Macedonia. While in Macedonia, he helped to organize the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem as well his gospel ministry (Acts 20:1–2; 2 Cor 8:1–4; 9:2). While his ministry was successful in Macedonia, it took him longer than expected to connect with Titus. Thus, it took him longer to hear how his severe letter had been received in Corinth (2 Cor 7:5).

Titus finally arrived with good news for Paul, which led Paul to rejoice (2 Cor 7:6–9). Paul had worried about the effects of his severe letter, fearing that he had been too harsh. Hearing Titus’ report comforted Paul greatly—the Corinthians had deep sorrow for their behavior, and were longing to see Paul. Paul was overjoyed, perhaps greater than ever with their response. If his severe letter had wounded them, it was only for a while (2 Cor 7:8).



At this point, in AD 56, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. Chapters 1–9 exhibit grace and relief while chapters 10–13 display a noticeably harsher tone. There are also several places within the letter in which the transition is less clear. This has led to the main difficulty in studies of 2 Corinthians—the issue of integrity.

The Message of 2 Corinthians

(This section is adapted from Brown, Twist, and Widder, *Lexham Bible Guide: 2 Corinthians*, 2013.)

Paul writes the letter known as 2 Corinthians to prepare the Corinthian church for his upcoming visit (12:14; 13:1). With this goal in mind, Paul devotes most of the letter to addressing doubts concerning his integrity and ministry that resulted from unresolved issues and recent events in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians, Paul confronts these doubts and implores the church to reconcile with him as their founding apostle in what is probably Paul's most personal and autobiographical letter. In response to these issues and challenges to the legitimacy of his apostleship on the basis of his alleged "weakness," Paul delivers a theological message that centers on the suffering Christ and the power of the resurrection.

The two main sections of 2 Corinthians reflect Paul's attempt to defend his ministry and address problems caused by rival leaders in Corinth. In the first nine chapters of the letter, Paul primarily explains the nature of his ministry after briefly accounting for changes to his previous plans to visit (1:15–2:13). He then explores the nature of his apostolic ministry (4:1–7:4). For Paul, the transformed perspective of the new covenant (3:1–18) allows him to regard his "weaknesses" as strengths that actually enhance his ministry and bring glory to God. Paul then returns to the question of his itinerary (7:5–16) before he makes his major appeal for the Jerusalem collection (8:1–9:15). In the second part of the letter, Paul takes up new challenges from the so-called "super apostles" in Corinth (10–13). He defends his own credentials while also criticizing the methods of his rivals throughout this section. The letter concludes with a final note about Paul's trip to Corinth (12:14–13:10).

Unity of 2 Corinthians

The majority opinion is that 2 Corinthians is a divided letter of at least two or more fragments. For example, J. Weiss divides the material of 2 Corinthians into four different letters (Weiss, *Christianity*, 1.323–57). The most influential partition theory for 2 Corinthians is found in G. Bornkamm's writing. He sees five letters in 2 Corinthians. The first letter is a letter of defense and includes 2:14–6:13; 7:2–4. The second is a letter of tears and is 10:1–13:10. He sees a letter of reconciliation composed of 1:1–2:13 and 7:5–16. The fourth letter is one of commendation made of 8:1–24. The fifth part is 9:1–15 (Bornkamm, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 162–94). W. Schmithals has found portions of 2 Corinthians in seven of 13 pieces (Schmithals, *Briefe*, 19–85).

While there are several partition theories, the four passages that present the most difficulty are 2:14–7:4; 6:14–7:1; 8:1–9:15; 10:1–13:13. Many find the transition between these sections and other portions of 2 Corinthians difficult. Sufficiently different subject matter and tone has lead scholars to argue that these passages are separate from the rest of 2 Corinthians; yet there are also good reasons to see 2 Corinthians as a unity.

2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4

J. Weiss has felt that 2:14–7:4 is an insertion and should be viewed separately (Weiss, *Urchristentum*, 265, 272). He believes this to be likely because Paul mentions his trip to Macedonia in 2:13, but the reader must wait until 7:5 to hear about the results. Weiss believes that the lengthy thanksgiving section of 2:14–7:4 seems unrelated to Paul's travels. Furthermore, Weiss sees conflict inserted in 2:17; 3:1; 4:2–3; and 5:12, which seems out of step with Paul's attitude in 1:1–2:13 and 7:5–8:24 (see also Halmel, *Korintherbrief*, 79–86).

Many words and ideas link 2:12–7:4 within the original composition of 2 Corinthians. Verbal links found in 7:4 also appear later in 7. In 2 Corinthians 7:4, Paul uses words such as "encouragement" and "tribulation" which can be found within 7:5–16. He also boasts in the Corinthians and will return to this idea of boasting in 7:14. In 2 Corinthians 7:4, Paul rejoices and then returns to the theme of joy in 7:7, 9, 13, and 16. Finally, he mentions affliction in 7:4 as well as in 7:5. With all of these connections, 2:14–7:4 is much less likely to be an insertion (Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 20–25).

An important consideration in evaluating the integrity of this portion of the letter is Paul's intention. He is not obligated to give a continuous account from 2:12–7:16. His digressions could be a result of his emotional dealings with the Corinthians. It is possible that as he was writing 2:12–13, he was emotionally moved, recalling his meeting with Titus in Macedonia. This may then have led to praise and thanksgiving, and thus account for his change of



thought. A Pauline digression is a better explanation for the change in thought in 2:14–7:4 than concluding that these verses are an insertion (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 14).

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1

Moffatt, Fitzmeyer, Gnilka, and Dahl have proposed that 6:14–7:1 is an insertion within 2 Corinthians (Moffatt, *Introduction to New Testament Literature*, 109–25; Fitzmeyer, “Qumran and the Interpolated Paragraph in 2 Cor 6,14–7,1” 271–80; Gnilka, “2 Cor 6:14–7:1,” 48–68; Dahl, “A Fragment and Its Context: 2 Corinthians 6:1–7:1,” 62–69). Particularly for Gnilka and Dahl, this idea emerged from similarities that they have found with literature from the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a result, they see 6:14–7:1 as Christianized theology that emerges from the non-Pauline Qumran community.

The argument for this view is that 6:14–7:1 lacks specific connections with the Corinthian problems. From their perspective, it calls for timeless principles of a holy life rather than addressing the specific situation at Corinth. They also believe that 6:14–7:1 interrupts the flow of 6:13–7:2. If 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 was removed, Paul’s writing could flow seamlessly from 6:13 to 7:2 with the exhortation for the Corinthians to open wide their hearts.

There are a series of words that are characteristically non-Pauline. Greek words translated into “unequally yoked” in 6:14, “agreement” and “Belial” in 6:15, and “agreement” in 6:16 (ESV) occur nowhere else in the Greek New Testament. Furthermore, two phrases in 7:1 translated from the ESV as “let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit” and “bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” are unique in Paul. Finally, the Old Testament passages that are quoted at the end of 6 are unique and not referred to anywhere else in Paul’s letters.

While there are non-Pauline elements within 6:14–7:1, there are also reasons to see this portion as being written by Paul, and part of the original composition of 2 Corinthians. The passage does contain similar themes which are found in other parts of 2 Corinthians. For example, the distinction between believers and unbelievers in 6:14–7:1 can also be found in 2:15–16 and 2 Cor 4:3–6. The “fear of God” found in 7:1 can be found in 5:11. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 and 6:2, there are Old Testament ideas that are taken from promises for divine restoration like those in 6:14–7:1.

Besides the overlap in ideas, 6:14–7:1 seems to refer to the specific situation at Corinth. The passage is a powerful call to separate from Gentile temple worship, which is a concern from the Corinthian correspondence. It also could fit well within Paul’s exhortation to separate from pagan influences from the rival super apostles (Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 26–29).

Finally, 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 does possess a common Pauline stylistic feature. Paul often declares who Christians are, with the use of an indicative verb, and then follows with a command. This is found repeatedly throughout 6:14b–16a where Christians are declared to be righteousness, light, believers, and a living temple. As a result, they are commanded to separate from unrighteousness, darkness, unbelievers, and idols.

While 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 may be an abrupt transition from chapter 6, it should be seen in unity with the rest of 2 Corinthians. Besides its correspondence with the rest of the book, Paul, as any writer, should be allowed to write periodically with unique words and phrases. A few unique words should not lead to the conclusions that the writing is non-Pauline.

Recent studies are supportive of the passage’s Pauline origin. They also support that the passage belongs within the larger argument of 2 Corinthians (compare Fee, “2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and Food Offered to Idols,” 140–61; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 25–36; Beale, “The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation,” 550–81).

2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15

There are a variety of opinions regarding the relationship of chapters 8–9 to 2 Corinthians. Windisch, Bornkamm, and Wendland split chapter 8 from chapter 9 and propose that Paul wrote 8 before 9. They find that chapter 8 was sent to the Corinthian congregation, while chapter 9 was written to Christians of Achaia (9:2; Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 242–43, 268–71, 286–89; Bornkamm, *Paul*, 245–46; Wendland, *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, 8–9, 222–23). Weiss, Schmithals, Dinkler, Betz, and others propose that chapters 8–9 originally were separate letters from 2 Corinthians (Weiss, *Christianity*, 1.356–57; Schmithals, *Briefe*, 77–85; Dinkler, *Korintherbriefe*, 18; Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 3–35).

There are, however, good reasons to see chapters 8–9 together. Paul continues his boast in 8:24 with further boasting in 9:2–3. Furthermore, the ministry of giving to the saints that Paul speaks of in 9:1 resumes his discussion



of the relief of the saints from 8:4. His use of brothers in 9:3, 5 resumes his brother-talk used in 8:16–23 (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 27–28).

There are then good reasons to see chapters 8–9 together, and following naturally upon chapters 1–7. While there is certainly a transition between 1–7 and 8, Paul is feeling confident with the defense of his apostolic ministry in chapters 1–7 (7:4, 16). Now is the appropriate time to encourage the collection for Christians in Jerusalem that was first started in 1 Cor 16 (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 24; Harris, *Second Corinthians* 29; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 38). Given Paul's defensiveness with the Corinthians, it is reasonable to believe that he would repeat his encouragement to give from 2 Cor 8 within 2 Cor 9 (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 24).

2 Corinthians 10–13

One of the most popular partition views in 2 Corinthians scholarship is to separate chapters 1–9 from chapters 10–13. This is known as the Semler hypothesis (Semler, *Paraphrasis*), and many modern commentators support this view (e.g., Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, deSilva, "Measuring Penultimate against Ultimate Reality," Murphy-O'Connor, *Second Corinthians*, Kruse, "The Relationship between the Opposition to Paul").

Semler bases his argument on a few notable differences, including a change in tone between 1–9 and 10–13. Titus' visit to Corinth appears to be a future event in 8:17–18, 22, but it appears to be a past event in 12:18. An imminent third Pauline visit is clear in chapter 13 but is not mentioned in chapters 1–9. Paul refers to "we" in 1–9, but in 10–13 he uses "I" or "me."

These objections, however, need not overthrow the traditional view of the letter's unity. It is possible that Paul received another report between the writing of 1–9 and 10–13 (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 38–39), and this could have led to the change in tone. Another possibility is that Paul addressed the repentant majority throughout 1–9 and then returned to address the unrepentant minority in 10–13 (Hafemann, *Second Corinthians*, 19–36).

While Titus' visit to Corinth appears to be a future event in 8:17–18, 22 but a past event in 12:18, it is possible that Paul is not referring to only one visit. There could be distinct, separate visits since in chapter 8 two brothers are with Titus in his visit, but in chapter 12 only one brother is with him. Titus would have initiated the collection, delivered the "severe letter," or both in chapter 8. His second visit could equally have involved delicate financial and personal matters in chapter 12 (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 40).

The change in emotion between these sections could fit the general tenor of 2 Corinthians in which Paul is quite emotional. Indeed, the seventh chapter of 2 Corinthians is one of the most emotional in all of Paul's writing. The sudden shift between chapters 9 and 10 within an already emotional letter might not be out of the question. The greater number of first person plurals within 10–13 can be explained by the personal nature of the conflict that Paul is having.

Paul's impending visit may not suddenly appear in 2 Cor 13, as those who see chapters 1–9 and 10–13 separately say. Hints of another Pauline visit can be seen in 2:1, 3 and 9:4, though he may not speak of it so directly in each of these places. In chapter 2, the Corinthians should be reconciled about the man who had wronged Paul. In chapter 9, the Corinthians should complete the collection and thus avert shame before he arrives.

Other matters make it likely that the traditional view—2 Corinthians as a single letter—is viable and preferable. There is a unified theme that runs throughout the entirety—a defense of Paul's apostleship (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 44–47). Some of the vocabulary appearing in both 1–9 and 10–13 occurs less frequently in other Pauline letters. For example, the word "commend" is found throughout the letter (3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12, 18; 12:11); it is found only five times outside of 2 Corinthians. The phrase "in Christ we speak before God" occurs only in 2:17 and 12:19, suggesting a unity between chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13 (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 19–21).

Findings from studies on ancient rhetoric have been used recently to support a unified letter. Second Corinthians 10–13 recapitulates the arguments from chapters 1–9, which parallels other ancient letters (such as those from Demosthenes, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, or Quintilian). In ancient apologetic letters, there was a section known as the *exordium* that raised issues and sought the audience's sympathy. Paul could have had this in mind from 1:1–11. Such letters would conclude with a *peroration*, which restated the issues raised in the *exordium*. Paul could be considering chapters 10–13 as the *peroration* (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 18–23; Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth*, 28, 37–38, 43–44).



Living Scripture with the Corinthians. Week 23: Considering 2 Corinthians - FAITHFULNESS

16

Several modern commentators promote 2 Corinthians as a unified letter (e.g., Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 31–33; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 328–39; Scott, *2 Corinthians*, 4–7, 200; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 33–44; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 42–51; Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 17–23). The discussion concerning the unity of 2 Corinthians, however, is far from decided.

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DRAKE WILLIAMS⁵

2 Corinthians 3:3-6

³ Clearly, you are a letter from Christ showing the result of our ministry among you. This "letter" is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts.

⁴ We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. ⁵ It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. ⁶ He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life.

⁵ Williams, D. (2016). [Corinthians, Second Letter to the](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



The Character of God

“Without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb. 11:6)—but it is also impossible to have *faith in God* without knowing the *character of God*. Faith is belief in God’s promises, which in turn are grounded in his character.

Ways in Which God Reveals Himself

God has revealed himself primarily in four overlapping ways: (1) actions; (2) names; (3) images; and (4) attributes, as seen in the chart. God reveals himself through actions, names, and images because they carry vivid, experiential, creative, and situational power. However, it is God’s attributes that are the fundamental descriptions of who he is.

Means of Revelation

actions
 names

Examples

creating, judging, redeeming
 “LORD” (Hb. *YHWH*, or *Yahweh*)
 “God Almighty” (Hb. *el Shadday*)
 “Master, Lord” (Hb. *’Adon*)
 Father, Rock, Husband, Shepherd
 holiness, goodness, love, grace, wrath

images
 attributes

Actions of God

God shows who he is in what he does. In creating the world, God shows his power, wisdom, beauty, goodness, and prodigious creativity. After the creation of humanity God talks to, walks with, and seeks out humans, even when they lapse into rebellion against him, showing that he is relational, personal, engaged, and caring. God demonstrates his holiness, wrath, and justice when he curses human rebellion in the garden and judges the unrighteous through the flood in Noah’s day. He shows his grace and mercy in establishing a covenant with Noah and Abraham. In sending his Son to live and die for humanity, he shows amazing love and compassion. Whenever God acts, we see his character displayed.

Names of God

God offers his name as a personal introduction and as a window into his character. This is why David says, “Those who know your name put their trust in you” (Ps. 9:10). To know his name is to know he is trustworthy. God’s act of naming himself is a profoundly gracious act of accommodation and engagement.

Among the many names for God in the Bible, there is none more important than *Yahweh* (translated “LORD”), a name that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:15). Linguistically related to the verb “I am,” *Yahweh* is packed with theological import. It most likely communicates God’s self-existence, independence, self-sufficiency, eternity, and unchanging character. These transcendent qualities are powerfully complemented when God also tells Moses to refer to him as “the God of your fathers” (Ex. 3:15). God is both majestic and intimate, the great, eternal “I AM,” the God who knows his children by name and keeps his covenant promises. Christian worship, discipleship, and preaching must maintain both healthy fear of the Lord *and* freedom and confidence in his presence.

Another striking and revealing name for God is “Jealous” (Hb. *’El qana’*). God tells Moses that he is so jealous for his glory expressed in the faithfulness of his people that “Jealous” is an appropriate name for himself. The reason God gives for his commandment against idolatry is grounded in his character as a jealous God: “For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex. 34:14). God deserves and demands absolute, exclusive loyalty and hates spiritual adultery. In his jealous love he refuses to allow his people to be supremely devoted to anything but himself. Because he is absolutely worthy of worship, allowing his people to love anything more than him would compromise his justice and love.

Images of God

Images of God are analogies from daily life that serve to illustrate his attributes. Among many other images, God is: Father, King, Consuming Fire, Judge, Husband, Shepherd, Potter, Farmer, Refiner, Landowner, Lion, Bear, Light, Water, Tower, and Lamb! These amazingly diverse descriptions from a multitude of human experiences offer pictures of God that reach minds and hearts in ways that abstract definitions do not. Images, like attributes and names, must be considered in relation to one another. If certain images are emphasized at the expense of others, God’s character will be misunderstood. The varied images in the Bible are all complementary to each other, and



each is vital for understanding God. For example, God as the Rock points out his strength, stability, and justice, while God as Husband gives insight into his loving, faithful, committed heart for his covenant people.

The image of God as a Rock is used in both OT and NT. Deuteronomy 32 especially highlights God as Rock in light of Israel's unfaithfulness: "You were unmindful of *the Rock* that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deut. 32:18; cf. Deut. 32:4, 13, 15, 30, 31, 37). Paul uses this image as a title of strength and applies it to Christ in 1 Corinthians 10:4: "and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ." Although the Rock (Hb. *tsur*) of Deuteronomy 32 is *Yahweh*, Paul applies the same title to Jesus. The Rock that followed and provided for the Israelites in the wilderness in the old covenant was the Christ who provides for the Corinthian believers in the new covenant. The Rock in the wilderness shares the same attributes as the Rock of the table, cup, and bread.

The strength and stability of the rock imagery is beautifully complemented by the tender, compassionate image of God as the Husband of his people. "For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called" (Isa. 54:5; cf. Jer. 2:2; Hosea 1–3). God's relational involvement with his people is so intimate and personal that he is jealous when his people are unfaithful. God speaks with the jealous voice of a husband who has been betrayed by an adulterous wife: "Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the LORD" (Jer. 3:20). The idea of God as a rock could lead to impersonal, static, cold conceptions, were it not for the intensely loving, engaged husband imagery. The marriage metaphor could reduce God to being weak, vulnerable, and pathetic if not for images like a rock (and a king, warrior, fire, etc.). Images of God bring his attributes from being mere abstractions into vivid clarity because they are based on our experiences of life.

Attributes of God

The attributes of God are the normative descriptions that images, names, and actions illuminate from different perspectives. His attributes are his essential characteristics that make him who he is. God's attributes are typically classified as either incommunicable or communicable. Incommunicable attributes are not shared by humans as are communicable attributes. The attributes can be organized using the classifications shown in Incommunicable Attributes and Communicable Attributes.

Incommunicable Attributes

Independence (self-existence, self-sufficiency, aseity)

Unchangeableness (immutability)

Eternity

Omnipresence

Unity (simplicity)

Communicable Attributes

Attributes Describing God's Being

Spirituality
Indivisibility

Mental Attributes

Knowledge (omniscience)
Wisdom
Truthfulness (faithfulness)

Moral Attributes

Goodness
Love



Mercy (grace, patience)
 Holiness
 Peace (or order)
 Righteousness or Justice
 Jealousy
 Wrath

Attributes of Purpose

Will
 Freedom
 Omnipotence (sovereignty)

Summary Attributes

Perfection
 Blessedness
 Beauty
 Glory

Practical Implications of the Incommunicable Attributes of God

Attribute	Scripture	Implication
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Independence: God does not need “The God who made the world and God never experiences need, so us or the rest of creation for everything in it, being Lord of serving God should never be anything, yet we and the rest of heaven and earth, does not live in motivated by the thought that he creation can glorify him and bring temples made by man, nor is he needs us. He is the provider in him joy.

served by human hands, as though everything he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:24–25; cf. Ex. 3:14; Job 41:11; Ps. 50:9–12; 90:2).

Immutability: God is unchanging in “For I the LORD do not change; God can always be trusted because his being, perfections, purposes, therefore you, O children of Jacob, he always keeps his word, and is and promises, although as he acts in are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6; for never capricious or moody. response to different situations he “being,” cf. Ps. 102:25–27; Mal. 3:6; feels emotions.

James 1:17; for “purposes,” cf. Ps. 33:11; Isa. 46:9–11; for “promises,” cf. Num. 23:19; Rom. 11:29).

Eternity: God has no beginning or “Before the mountains were Those who trust the God of eternity end and is in no way bound by time, brought forth, or ever you had can know peace, rest, and comfort although he sees events and acts informed the earth and the world, in the busyness of life and in spite his world in time, which is in fact from everlasting to everlasting you of impending death, for God keeps one dimension of the created are God” (Ps. 90:2; cf. Ex. 3:14; Job them in safety and joy forever.

36:26; Ps. 90:4; Isa. 46:9–10; John 8:58; 1 Tim. 6:16; 2 Pet. 3:8; Jude 24–25; Rev. 1:8; 4:8).

Omnipresence: God does not have “Am I a God at hand, declares the God can be sought anywhere spatial dimensions and is present LORD, and not a God far away? Can regardless of place. Believers



Living Scripture with the Corinthians.
 Week 23: Considering 2 Corinthians - FAITHFULNESS

everywhere with his whole being, a man hide himself in secret places should never feel lonely, and the though he acts differently in so that I cannot see him? declares wicked should never feel safe. different situations.

the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:23–24; cf. 1 Kings 8:27; Ps. 139:7–10; Isa. 66:1–2; Acts 7:48–50).

Practical Implications of the Communicable Attributes of God

Attribute	Scripture	Implication
<p>Holiness: God is absolutely and uniquely excellent above creation (majesty) and without (purity).</p>	<p style="padding-left: 40px;">"And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'" (Rev. 4:8; for "majestic holiness," cf. Ex. 15:11; 1 Chron. 16:27–29; Isa. 57:15; for "moral holiness," cf. Isa. 5:16; 6:1–8; Acts 3:14; Heb. 7:26).</p>	<p>God should be feared and obeyed, and his people should earnestly pursue moral purity.</p>
<p>Omnipotence: God is able to do all his holy will.</p>	<p style="padding-left: 40px;">"Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" (Isa. 46:9–10; cf. Ex. 6:3; Job 37:23; 40:2; 42:1–6; Ps. 24:6; 33:10–11; 91:1; Dan. 4:34–35; Matt. 28:18).</p>	<p>God's ultimate will is never frustrated by evil, so there is peace and confidence in the face of suffering for those who trust God.</p>
<p>Sovereignty: God has absolute rule over creation as King and total control and determination over that happens.</p>	<p style="padding-left: 40px;">"His dominion is an everlasting kingdom, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" (Dan. 4:34–35; cf. 1 Chron. 29:11–13; Ps. 22:28; 24:1; 47:7–9; 103:19; Prov. 16:19, 21, 33; Dan. 4:25; 7:1–28; 12:1–13; Matt. 6:13; 10:29; Acts 17:26; Eph. 1:11; 1 Tim. 6:15; James 1:13–15).</p>	<p>Mankind should obey and submit to God as humble subjects of his kingdom.</p>



Living Scripture with the Corinthians.
Week 23: Considering 2 Corinthians - FAITHFULNESS

Omniscience: God fully knows “Whenever our heart condemns us, All God’s thoughts and actions are himself and all things actual and God is greater than our heart, and perfectly informed by perfect possible—past, present, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:20; knowledge, so he is perfectly future. cf. Job 28:24; 37:16; Ps. 139:1–3; trustworthy. 147:5; Isa. 55:8–9; Matt. 10:29–30; Rom. 11:33–34; 1 Cor. 2:10–11; Heb. 4:13).

Wisdom: God always knows and “Blessed be the name of God God’s wisdom is not always clear to chooses the best goals and the best forever and ever, to whom belongs, but it is great, deep, valuable, means to those goals. Wisdom is a wisdom and might” (Dan. 2:20; cf. and should be highly desired and moral as well as an intellectual Job 9:4; 12:13; Ps. 104:24; Rom. sought, and we should not doubt its quality. 11:33; 16:27; 1 Cor. 1:21–29; Eph. reality even in circumstances that 3:10–11). upset us.

Love: God freely and eternally gives “Anyone who does not love does God is eager to extravagantly give of himself. The ultimate historical not know God, because God is love. of himself to meet the needs of lost demonstration of God’s love is seen In this the love of God was made sinners, so they should flee to him in the cross of Christ. manifest among us, that God sent with confidence (cf. Rom. 8:32). his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:8–10; cf. John 3:16; 15:13; 17:24; Rom. 5:8; 8:31–39; Gal. 2:20; 1 John 3:16; 4:16).

Wrath: God intensely hates and “Then the kings of the earth and the God should be greatly feared. responds with anger to all sin and great ones and the generals and the Unbelievers should fear his rebellion. God hates every threat torich and the powerful, and judgment and turn to Christ for what he loves. everyone, slave and free, his salvation. Believers should fear themselves in the caves and among God’s fatherly discipline. The God the rocks of the mountains, calling who loves us is also the holy God to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on who hates sin (1 Pet. 1:17). us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:15–16; cf. Ex. 34:7; Rom. 1:18; 2:4; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Pet. 3:9).

The Unity of God

This list of classified attributes of God can be helpful in developing an organized perspective on God’s character. However, his character cannot be reduced to a quantifiable list of properties. Maintaining the unity of God’s attributes is essential in the study of his character. His unity means that although we experience certain attributes more clearly at certain times, nevertheless, his attributes are not divided into parts and must always be understood interdependently. His attributes are not petals on a flower to be plucked off and viewed in isolation from the rest. The unity of God requires finite creatures to pursue a holistic understanding of him. When God expresses judgment and wrath, he does not cease to be merciful, patient, or kind in that moment. He never expresses certain attributes at the expense of others. Fallen humans tend to emphasize attributes that affirm our personal inclinations,



experience, and contemporary sensibilities. Considering God's attributes independently of each other leads to unbalanced idolatrous conceptions of God. A biblically integrated understanding of God involves, along with a list of attributes, the work of the Spirit, the whole counsel of God's Word accurately interpreted, the input of church history, and the input of believers from diverse cultures.

Examples of Application to Life

The two charts labeled "Practical Implications" offer a brief survey of some of God's attributes. Each section of the charts provides a basic definition of an attribute (based on Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*), a key passage of supporting Scripture, and one basic implication for daily life.

God's Attributes Are Seen Most Clearly in Christ

Jesus Christ is the most definitive revelation of all of these attributes. To see God's character we look ultimately to God incarnate: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). In the cross of Christ all God's major attributes are displayed in condensed lucidity. His wrath, grace, justice, mercy, sovereignty, goodness, love, holiness, compassion, wisdom, and power meet there for the world to see. When discussions of God's attributes become esoteric and sterile, it is the face and cross of Christ that restores radical clarity, reality, and compelling beauty.

The Trinity

The biblical teaching on the Trinity embodies four essential affirmations:

1. There is one and only one true and living God.
2. This one God eternally exists in three persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
3. These three persons are completely equal in attributes, each with the same divine nature.
4. While each person is *fully* and *completely* God, the persons are not identical.

The differences among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are found in the way they relate to one another and the role each plays in accomplishing their unified purpose.

The unity of nature and distinction of persons of the Trinity is helpfully illustrated in the diagram.

The Trinity

God Is One God: Monotheism

There is nothing more fundamental to biblical theology than monotheism (the biblical belief that there is one and only one God): "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). This verse, known as the *Shema* in Hebrew (from the opening verb of the verse meaning "hear" or "listen"), is one of the most familiar and foundational verses in the OT. God rejects polytheism (belief in many gods) and demands exclusive devotion: "I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God" (Isa. 45:5; cf. Deut. 4:35, 39; 1 Kings 8:60; Isa. 40:18; 46:9). The NT affirms the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as we shall see, but does not waver from OT monotheism (John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:4–6; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19). Jesus quotes the *Shema* in a debate with the Jewish leaders (Mark 12:29), and Paul continues to teach that there is one God while recognizing Jesus as the divine-human Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

Implications of Monotheism

Because there is only one God, idolatry of any kind is evil, foolish, wrong, and harmful. Worship of other "gods" robs the true God of the devotion and glory he alone deserves. Idolatry can take many forms. Idols are not only man-made objects but are *anything* allowed to compete with God for ultimate loyalty. According to Jesus, money can become an idol: "You cannot serve God and money" (Matt. 6:24). Greed, lust, and impurity can also become



indicators of idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). Idolatry is foolish, deceptive, and dangerous—and may even involve demonic activity (1 Cor. 10:19–20).

Because there is only one God, he alone should be the ultimate object of the believer's affections. He alone deserves absolute allegiance and obedience. The Great Commandment that follows the *Shema* is the obvious implication of monotheism: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). The one true God deserves all we are and have. He deserves wholehearted love because nothing compares with him.

God Is Three Persons: The Tri-unity of God

As the nature of God is progressively revealed in Scripture, the one God is seen to exist eternally in three persons. These three persons share the same divine nature yet are different in role and relationship. The basic principle at the heart of God's triune being is *unity* and *distinction*, both coexisting without either being compromised. Anything that is necessarily true of God is true of Father, Son, and Spirit. They are equal in essence yet distinct in function.

The doctrine of the Trinity is most fully realized in the NT where the divine Father, Son, and Spirit are seen accomplishing redemption. But while the NT gives the clearest picture of the Trinity, there are hints within the OT of what is yet to come. In the beginning of the Bible, the Spirit of God is "hovering over the face of the waters" at creation (Gen. 1:2) and is elsewhere described as a personal being, possessing the attributes of God and yet distinct from Yahweh (Isa. 48:16; 61:1; 63:10). Some interpreters think that the plurality within God is seen in the Hebrew word for God, *'Elohim*, which is plural in form (though others disagree that this is significant; the word is used with singular verbs and all agree that it has a singular meaning in the OT). In addition, the use of plural pronouns when God refers to himself hints at a plurality of persons: "Then God said, 'Let *us* make man in *our* image' " (Gen. 1:27; cf. Gen. 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8). The plurality of God also seems to be indicated when the Angel of the Lord appears in the OT as one who represents Yahweh, while yet at times this angel seems to be no different in attributes or actions from God himself (cf. Gen. 16:7, 10–11, 13; 18:1–33; Ex. 3:1–4:31; 32:20–22; Num. 22:35, 38; Judg. 2:1–2; 6:11–18). There are also passages in the OT that call two persons God or Lord: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions" (Ps. 45:6–7). David says, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool' " (Ps. 110:1). The God who is set above his companions (Ps. 45:6) and the Lord of Psalm 110:1 are recognized as Christ in the NT (Heb. 1:8, 13). Christ himself applies Psalm 110:1 to himself (Matt. 22:41–46). Other passages give divine status to a messianic figure distinct from Yahweh (Prov. 8:22–31; 30:4; Dan. 7:13–14).

The OT glimpses of God's plurality blossom into the full picture of the Trinity in the NT, where the deity and distinct personalities of Father, Son, and Spirit function together in perfect unity and equality (on the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, see The Person of Christ). Perhaps the clearest picture of this distinction and unity is Jesus' baptism, where the Son is anointed for his public ministry by the Spirit, descending as a dove, with the Father declaring from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:13–17). All three persons of the Trinity are present, and each one is doing something different.

The NT authors employ a Trinitarian cadence as they write about the work of God. Prayers of blessing and descriptions of gifts within the body of Christ are Trinitarian in nature: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14); "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone" (1 Cor. 12:4–6). The persons of the Trinity are also linked in the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19–20, "baptizing them in [or into] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." There are many other passages that reveal the Trinitarian, or at least the plural, nature of God (e.g., John 14:16, 26; 16:13–15; 20:21–22; Rom. 8:9; 15:16, 30; 2 Cor. 1:21–22; Gal. 4:4–6; Eph. 2:18; 4:4–6; 1 Pet. 1:1–2; 1 John 4:2, 13–14; Jude 20–21).

Differences in roles also appear consistently in biblical testimonies concerning the relationships between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The uniform pattern of Scripture is that the Father plans, directs, and sends; the Son is sent by the Father and is subject to the Father's authority and obedient to the Father's will; and both Father and Son direct and send the Spirit, who carries out the will of both. Yet this is somehow consistent with equality in being and



in attributes. The Father created through the Son (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), and the Father planned redemption and sent the Son into the world (John 3:16; Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:3–5). The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption for us (John 4:34; 5:19; 6:38; Heb. 10:5–7; cf. Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 15:28; Heb. 1:3). The Father did not come to die for our sins, nor did the Holy Spirit, but that was the role of the Son. The Father and Son both send the Holy Spirit in a new way after Pentecost (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). These relationships existed eternally (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8), and they provide the basis for simultaneous equality and differences in various human relationships.

Within God there is both unity and diversity: unity without uniformity, and diversity without division. The early church saw this Trinitarian balance clearly. For example, the Athanasian Creed (c. A.D. 500) says:

We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity; we distinguish among the persons, but we do not divide the substance.... The entire three persons are co-eternal and co-equal with one another, so that ... we worship complete unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.

This unity and diversity is at the heart of the great mystery of the Trinity. Unity without uniformity is baffling to finite minds, but the world shows different types of reflections of this principle of oneness and distinction at every turn. What is the source of the transcendent beauty in a symphony, the human body, marriage, ecosystems, the church, the human race, a delicious meal, or a perfectly executed fast break in basketball? Is it not, in large part, due to the distinct parts coming together to form a unified whole, leading to a unified result? Unity and distinction—the principle at the heart of the Trinity—can be seen in much of what makes life so rich and beautiful. Woven into the fabric of the world are multiple reflections of the One who made it with unity and distinction as the parallel qualities of its existence.

Historical Misunderstandings of the Trinity

One of the most fundamental ways to misunderstand the Trinity is *tritheism*, which overemphasizes the distinction between the persons of the Trinity and ends up with three gods. This view neglects the oneness of the natures of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the other end of the spectrum is the heresy of *modalism* (also known as Sabellianism, named after its earliest proponent, Sabellius, 3rd century), which loses the distinctions between the persons and claims that God is only one person. In this view, the appearance of the three persons is merely three *modes* of existence of the one God. For instance, God reveals himself as Father when he is creating and giving the law, as Son in redemption, and as Spirit in the church age. A contemporary version of modalism is found in the teaching of Oneness Pentecostalism. Both tritheism and modalism fail to maintain the biblical balance between the one reality of God and his eternal existence in three persons. A third error is to deny the full deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and to say that they were at some time created. This is the heresy of *Arianism* (after a teacher named Arius, c. A.D. 256–336), and it is held today by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Practical Implications of the Trinity

What are some of the practical implications of the doctrine of the Trinity?

1. The doctrine of the Trinity makes definitive revelation of God possible as he is known in Christ: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:18). No man can see God and live (Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16), but God the Son provided an actual manifestation of God in the flesh.

2. The Trinity makes the atonement possible. Redemption of sinful man is accomplished through the distinct and unified activity of each person of the Godhead: "how much more will the blood of *Christ*, who through the eternal *Spirit* offered himself without blemish to *God*, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14).

3. Because God is triune, he has eternally been personal and relational in his own being, in full independence from his creation. God has never had any unmet needs, "nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:25). Personhood becomes real only within realized relationships, and the reality of relationship can only exist where one has something or someone that is not oneself to relate to; if, then, God had not been plural in himself he could not have been a



personal, relational God till he had begun creating, and thus would have been dependent on creation for his own personhood, which is a notion as nonsensical as it is unscriptural. Between the persons of the Trinity, there has always existed total relational harmony and expression; God is, from this standpoint, a perfect society in himself. Apart from the plurality in the Trinity, either God's eternal independence of the created order or his eternally relational personal existence would have to be denied.

4. The Trinity provides the ultimate model for relationships within the body of Christ and marriage (1 Cor. 11:3; 12:4–6; Eph. 4:4–7).

The doctrine of the Trinity is well beyond human ability to ever fully comprehend. However, it is central to understanding the nature of God and the central events in the history of salvation, in which God is seen acting as, in effect, a tripersonal team. Biblical Christianity stands or falls with the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Person of Christ

Four statements must be understood and affirmed in order to attain a complete biblical picture of the person of Jesus Christ:

1. Jesus Christ is fully and completely *divine*.
2. Jesus Christ is fully and completely *human*.
3. The divine and human natures of Christ are *distinct*.
4. The divine and human natures of Christ are completely *united* in one person.⁹

⁹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). [*The ESV Study Bible*](#) (pp. 2510–2515). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.