

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

2 Corinthians 1

Introduction

Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Corinth around 56AD, shortly after his first letter. The city of Corinth is in southern Greece, to the west of Athens. It was located on major trade routes during the time of Paul. It was a large and prosperous city that had a reputation for the grossest forms of immorality. Paul established the church several years before, during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-11). Paul wrote this letter because the Corinthian Christians were not living moral lives. Disputes, factions and sexual immorality were among the problems that Paul hoped to correct. Many were living disgraceful lives(,) that gratified their sinful desires. Also, some were questioning Paul's integrity and his authority.

Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-11)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all of our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

1. Paul begins this letter in a formal manner, by reminding the Corinthian Christians that he is an apostle called by God. In this way, he reinforces that what he

is about to say comes from a person that has been given special authority by God, to proclaim the gospel, instruct and correct in righteousness. (Gal 1:11-24)
Why do you think Paul does this? What are some ways that God confirmed that Paul is an apostle?

2. It by grace, or God's unmerited favor, that Christians are made holy through faith in Jesus. It is by grace that Christians are changed and made holy in the likeness of Jesus. It is by grace that Christians have peace with God. This is completely due to the work and will of God and does not involve human effort. (Eph 2:8-9)
3. Paul uses the title of "Lord Jesus Christ" many times in these opening verses. He reminds them that they are saved to serve Jesus as their Lord. Christians are purchased by the blood of Jesus and are his servants. Christians must seek to know and obey God's will. This is why it is important to know the Bible, pray and be part of a group of born-again Christians. (1 Cor 6:19-20)
4. Paul speaks of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, which teaches that God is both of these persons. (Jn 10:30; 17:11)
5. Christians will be persecuted and suffer for their faith in Jesus. Paul says that enduring such suffering, God provides comfort and even joy. (Mt 24 :9; Acts 5:41)
Have you experienced the joy and love of Jesus) which brings comfort during trials and persecution?
6. Paul says that God delivered him from many trials and persecution. These things strengthened his faith and resolve, to endure hardships for the gospel. *Have you experienced spiritual growth and a closer walk with Jesus in times of distress?*
7. Paul teaches that the prayers of the Corinthian Christians were effective in delivering him from many perils. *How has God answered your prayers for others?*

Paul Explains His Actions (1:12-24)

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace. For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, as you come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus. Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have

you send me on my way to Judea. When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, “Yes, yes” and “No, no”? But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. 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 as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. I call on God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

1. Paul says that he has been honest and straightforward in his relationship with them. Christians must be a people who have integrity in all of their relationships. *Why is this so important? How does a lack of integrity in Christians, dishonor God and keep people from believing in Jesus?* (Mt 5:33-37; Jas 5:12)
2. Paul says that God keeps his promises and does not change his mind. His word is his bond. This is why we study the Bible and can rely upon its promises.
3. Salvation is the based on the will and work of God from start to finish. Paul says that Jesus anointed us by his death. We are saved by faith in his blood poured out for our forgiveness. He has given us the Holy Spirit, who is the sign or seal of our being owned by Jesus. The Holy Spirit within believers works to make us like Jesus. (1 Cor 6:19-20; Eph 2:8-10; Ti 3:4-7; Phil 1:3-6, 2:12-13)

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2 Corinthians 2

Repentance and Forgiveness (2:1-11)

So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you. If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much

grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

1. Paul apparently had previously visited with the Corinthian Christians and had rebuked them for sins and errors. He hopes that this letter will be enough to cause them to exercise church discipline and correct errors.
2. Paul stresses his concern for the Corinthian Christians whom he considers to be dear friends. Paul is a teacher, mentor and friend. He refers to them as his children. *How is Paul showing parental love by instructing them and then trusting that they will do the right thing?* (1 Cor 4:14-16)
3. Paul says that disciplined believers should be forgiven and restored to the church, provided they repent and change their ways. The goal of church discipline must always be for the benefit of the person who needs correction. It is not to make those doing the correction feel morally superior or to put people in their place.
4. *What are the dangers to the church beliefs and practices if those sinning in obvious and public ways are not disciplined? What is wrong with churches who say that everyone is welcome to join, regardless of their beliefs or lifestyles?*

The Fragrance of the Gospel (2:12-17)

Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

1. Although Paul longed to visit the Corinthian Christians, the Holy Spirit caused him to go to new areas to spread the gospel. The lordship of Jesus was the driving force for Paul. *How has the lordship of Jesus changed your life and priorities?*
2. *How is the gospel of Jesus like a sweet fragrance to Christians? How is it like a repulsive stench for those who reject Jesus?* The way that people respond to talking about Jesus is a powerful indicator of whether they know him as Savior and Lord.
3. Paul supported himself and did not seek the support of those who were converted by his efforts. (1 Cor 9:7-19) *How can the love of money, fame and influence corrupt Christian teachers? How does this corruption change their sincerity? How does this affect integrity?*
4. Everyone needs to be held accountable for their actions and motives. This is why it is important to have one or more Christians who can be trusted. We need to pray together regularly with these trusted friends and be willing to be honest with them about our needs. Christians are called to be sheep not loners. *Do you have at least one trusted Christian who helps you?* (Prov 27:17)

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Sunday School Lesson

2 Corinthians 3

The New Covenant of Grace (3:1-17)

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is

the glory of that which lasts! Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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.

1. Some traveling teachers in the early Church, brought letters of recommendation as validation of their abilities and the truth of their teachings. Paul reminded them that he did not need this because they knew him and the truth of what he taught. Their conversion was evidence that God confirmed Paul and worked through him. *What are some reasons that evidence of seminary training is important in evaluating the teachings of ministers or pastors? Are there any disadvantages to limiting the selection of teachers, based mainly on seminary credentials?*
2. Paul says that it is the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through him, rather than human credentials, that makes him a valid and competent teacher. He claims his competency comes from God and not men.
3. Paul calls the laws of Moses the covenant of death. *Why is this?* (Rom 3:19-26)
4. When Moses received the Ten Commandments of God, his face glowed because he was in the presence of God on Mount Sinai. (Ex 34:29-33) This radiance faded with time. However, the glory of those who put their faith in Jesus will never fade, as they will reflect God's glory. (Rom 8:18-23; Phil 3:20-21; Pet 5:4)
5. Paul says that the Jews, (and others who do not believe in Jesus), do not accept Jesus because their minds and hearts are darkened, as though covered with a veil. This prevents the light of the gospel from reaching them. This teaching shows that it is by God's grace that we are saved. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to remove the veil from those God has chosen. (Ti 3:4-7)
6. Those who are born-again through faith in Jesus are adopted by God. These Christians are declared holy and will shine in the glorious presence of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 8:12-18; Phil 2:12-16)

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2 Corinthians 4

The Gospel Brings Glory to Christ (4:1-7)

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

1. False teachers were promoting heresies like Gnosticism, which taught that there were spiritual secrets which only more advanced Christians could know and understand. This set up different levels of Christians, similar to the teachings of Free Masons. Paul says that the gospel does not contain secrets and there are no elite or common Christians. (Gal 3:26-29) *Are there other false churches or religions that promote this type of thinking?*
2. False teachers also use deception and distort the Bible. They mix errors with the truth to confuse and mislead. One common method is to teach that salvation is a combination of works (such as the sacraments) and faith. This leads to many false doctrines that put people on a treadmill of striving to be good enough. The Bible clearly teaches that no amount of good works can cause God to accept us as holy and blameless. This can only be done by God himself. (Rom 3:19-26; 6:23)
3. Satan is the god of this age, who blinds the minds of people so that they do not accept the gospel of Jesus. This blindness can come in many ways, such as through scientific teachings, pride, pleasures, false religions and family traditions. *How do these types of blindness keep people from accepting Jesus? Are there some other ways that also blind people?*

4. Born-again Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This presence of God gives us understanding and enables us to know and obey Jesus. This is our treasure and the light of God that shines through Christians. (1 Cor 2:14-16, 6:19-20)
How have your thoughts and actions been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit within you?

Perservance in Suffering (4:8-18)

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. It is written: "I believed therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

1. Many times, success in preaching the gospel and in strengthening Christians brings more trials and temptations. This was certainly true for Paul who suffered constant opposition from many directions. *Why do you think this happens?*
2. Christians are called to die to their own will and ways, so that they might think and live like Jesus. In this way, we are being delivered to death daily through the work of the Holy Spirit within us. This is necessary so that the world will see this transformation, which bears witness to the truth of the gospel. (Mt 16:24-27; Rom 6:5-14; Gal 2:20) *How has the Holy Spirit changed you? How have these changes in you shown others the truth of the gospel?*
3. Paul says that we should not be paralyzed by fears and opposition to the gospel. We are to focus our lives on honoring Jesus and expanding his kingdom. Time is slipping away from each of us. We have only a limited number of opportunities to do the good works which God has prepared for us to do. The troubles of this world are temporary, but the rewards of heaven are permanent. (Heb 12:1-11)

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Sunday School Lesson

2 Corinthians 5

Longing for Heaven (5:1-10)

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal home in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

1. Paul refers to our human bodies as a tent, in contrast to our glorified bodies. A tent is temporary and for someone who is just passing through. It is also fragile compared to a building. Paul says that our heavenly bodies and dwelling are built by God and so are permanent.
2. Christians should have a yearning to be with Jesus in heaven. Paul says Christians feel their sinfulness and imperfections. This is like feeling naked and incomplete in this life. Christians long to be like Jesus, holy and perfect. No longer subject to diseases, decay and death.
3. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us is our guarantee that God has forgiven us and is transforming us into his likeness. This transformation is gradual in this life and is mainly of our minds. When we die, our soul (conscious mind) and spirit go to be with Jesus. We will be judged and rewarded for the good deeds we have done, in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The body will decay until it is resurrected and reunited with our mind and soul. When this happens, we will be fully clothed in the likeness of Jesus and mortality will have been changed into eternal life.

A New Creation (5:11-21)

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, 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, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 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. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1. Paul says that the fear of God motivated him to preach the gospel. The Bible teaches that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. (Prov 9:10) *How does the fear of God lead us to faith? How does the fear of God lead us to do good works?* (1 Cor 9:16-18)
2. Paul tells the Corinthian Christians not to take pride in outward appearances but to take pride in what is in their hearts. It is in the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of Christians, that we must be guided. This is our treasure, our joy and our pride. (1 Cor 1:27-31; 2 Cor 10:12-18)
3. The great love of Jesus also motivates Christians to do good works. From beginning to end, the Bible is a story about fear and love, judgment and mercy. Christians know the depths of their sinfulness, deserving judgment. They also know the great love and sacrifice of Jesus, who performs a wonderful and merciful pardon and restoration to holiness. (Jn 3:16-18)
4. Paul says that those who are born-again through faith in Jesus become a new type of human. Christians are a holy people and are royalty because we bear the likeness of Jesus. Those who do not believe, remain objects of God's wrath and judgment. Jesus is the only way to go from ruin to royalty. (Jn 14:6; 1 Pet 2:9-10)

5. Paul says that Christians are messengers of reconciliation to God. This is because we have received forgiveness and know the presence of God within. It is this joy and love that motivates us to share the gospel with others, in the hope that, they too, will become new creatures in Christ Jesus. *Is there someone on your heart that you would like to share the gospel with? What is holding you back?*

Paul concludes this section with the wonderful and mysterious truth that Jesus became like us, so that we could become like him. *What does this mean to you? When you think of Jesus on the cross, do you see yourself there with him?*

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Sunday School Lesson

2 Corinthians 6

Sacrifices Validate the Gospel Message (6:1-10)

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as imposters; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

1. Paul calls the Corinthian Christians "fellow workers." Every Christian is called to work for the expansion of the kingdom of God by doing good deeds, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Christian faith is not fire insurance to just keep you from going to hell. Jesus is both savior and lord. You cannot have one without the other. To try to do so is to receive the grace of God with false pretenses and questions whether the person has been born again.
2. God is the one who calls each person to salvation. He also enables each person to believe in Jesus and to receive his gift of faith. (Eph 2:8-10)

3. Paul says that he and his fellow workers have suffered much to bring the gospel to others. This is not to boast, but to show his commitment and that there will be hardships and opposition. Christians are called to be living sacrifices, for the sake of honoring Jesus and expanding his kingdom. (Ps 116:12-16; Mk 8 34-35; Rom 12: 1-2) *What have you sacrificed for Jesus?*
4. The way Paul lived is an example to Christians. He did not desire fame, fortune or glory for himself. He lived for the benefit of others to the detriment of himself. *Do you know some Christians who have lived like this? Do you know some Christians who expect to be honored and who exercise power, fame and influence over others?*

Sanctification and Separation (6:11-18)

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also. Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. “Therefore, come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

1. Paul expresses his deep feelings for the Corinthian Christians. He appeals to them with love, as a father to his children, to listen to his advice. Parents should follow this example and not be afraid to show their feelings for their children. They should make it clear that what they advise is based on their love and concern for their children. *Why do parents sometimes just give their children rules without explaining the reasons and their fears or concerns?*
2. Bad company corrupts good people. Christians are to avoid relationships that influence them to disobey God. This includes marrying or going into business with unbelievers. *How can an unbelieving spouse or business partner have negative effects on the habits, witness and spiritual growth of a Christian? What about unbelieving friends?*
3. Christians should build positive friendships with unbelievers, but separate when these friendships cause them to sin. Jesus was friendly towards sinners and tax

collectors, but he did not follow their sinful behavior. Christians are to be in the world but not of it. *How can we be salt and light, to show others the love of Jesus and the truth of the gospel, if we confine ourselves to church friends?* (Mt 5:13-16; 9:10-13; 28:18-20)

4. Friendships are based on common interests, values and behaviors. There are many areas in which Christians can be friends with unbelievers. We must be honest with unbelieving friends about our moral values and why we refuse to participate in sinful behavior. This should be done in love and with respect. Friends will either respect us or reject us. If they respect us, then there may be an opportunity to share the gospel with them.
5. Christians must separate from any church that admits unbelievers into its membership. They also must separate from Christians who profess false teachings not found in the Bible. If possible, we should share our reasons for separation, based on the teachings of the Bible. Let the words of God confront and convict them of their false beliefs. *What are some false teachings that require us to separate? What are some minor differences of opinion, on the interpretation of the Bible, for which we should not separate?*

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2 Corinthians 7

Repentance and Sanctification (7:1-16)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds. For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were

made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.

1. Learning to please Jesus is a growth process that requires Bible study, prayer and friendships with other born-again Christians. Our motivation is our love for Jesus and our desire to become more like him. This is a life-long process that will not be completed until we are in heaven. Paul says that we should strive to eliminate anything that corrupts our minds, body and spirit. *What are some things that you have given up because they were an evil influence on you? What are some things that may be a mixture of good and evil? What do you do in these cases?*
2. Paul restates his love and confidence in the Corinthian Christians. They had followed Paul's warnings and his instructions. They were sorry for their sins. They confessed their errors and followed Paul's instructions. This process of admitting to sins, confessing and forsaking them, is called repentance. Godly repentance comes from a change of thinking through the work of the Holy Spirit. *How has the Holy Spirit changed your thinking and actions?*
3. There are many types of natural or worldly sorrow. People are sorry that they got caught and embarrassed. They are sorry that they did not get what they were striving for. They are sorry for some loss of property or relationship. These types of sorrow can lead to bitterness, despair and hatred. In the end, worldly or natural sorrow is negative but Godly sorrow brings joy and the restoration of relationships. *Why is this?*
4. *How was Titus refreshed and energized by the Corinthian Christians?* Those around us are encouraged and love grows, when we appreciate, honor and respect each other. *What are some simple ways that you can refresh your spouse,*

relatives and friends?

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

2 Corinthians 8

The Grace of Giving (8:1-9)

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

1. Paul says that God had given the Christians in Macedonia, which is in northern Greece, the desire to be generous in giving to other Christians in need. This grace of giving is contrary to human nature. They were fearless in helping others. They did not worry about themselves, even to the point of depriving themselves of their own needs. They had complete peace in believing that God would meet their needs.
2. The Macedonian Christians were like the poor widow who was praised by Jesus. She did not give as much as others financially, but she gave all that she had. (Mk 12:41-44)
3. The Macedonian Christians were eager to help and did not have to be pressured to give. *Why is it that those who are poor might be more generous than those who are rich?*
4. *How does complete commitment to Jesus, through self-sacrifice, produce joy?* (Ps 116:12-19; Mt 16:24-25; 2 Cor 9:7)

5. Jesus gave up his glory and comfort in heaven to become a poor carpenter's son. When he was crucified, he gave up all his possessions, even his clothes. He then gave his life for us. He became poor, so that we might share in his glory and riches in heaven. Acts of self-denial, in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit, give God pleasure and honor him. *What have you given up under the leading of the Holy Spirit? Have you felt joy and the pleasure of God by such sacrifice?*

Be Zealous to do Good Works (8:10-24)

And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: "He who gathered much did not (have or give) give too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little." I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men. In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason of our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

1. The Corinthian Christians had started a good work to raise money for Christians in need. Paul encourages them to complete this work. For some reason, they had not sent their support. *What are some reasons that might have kept them from doing so? What are some reasons that keep Christians from consistently supporting the needs of poor Christians in other places? Why do Christians sometimes need to be encouraged and reminded about these needs?*
2. God desires that those who have more, should give to those in need. In this way,

God's blessings of food, wealth and other things are multiplied to everyone. Those who have more are doubly blessed, because they not only have an abundance, but they get to be gracious and merciful to those in need. In this way, they show their gratitude to God and copy his example of providing loving care. *How do divisions, such as denominations, become barriers to this principle of giving? What are some other reasons why Christians are not more active in supporting poor Christians in other places?*

3. Paul is entrusting the money that has been raised, to be delivered by a group of men who have proven themselves to be dedicated and honorable. Christian leaders should be selected by their congregations, based on a proven history of zealous works and their integrity. They must adhere to the teachings of the Bible and have a group of men to whom they are accountable. Everyone is ultimately accountable to God. However, we all need to have Christians that we trust and who will pray for us and advise us. *Do you have one or more friends like this?* If not, you need to pray that God will provide this for you.

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

2 Corinthians 9

Be Generous (9:1-15)

There is no need for me to write you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things and at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and

bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

1. The Macedonian Christians became energized to give to the poor when Paul told them about the enthusiasm of the Corinthian Christians. Sharing testimonies about how the Holy Spirit enables good works, changes lives, and encourages Christians. *How does the energy and enthusiasm of Christians motivate others to do good works?*
2. Christians should regularly share how God is working in their lives and those of others. Salvation testimonies, healings, spiritual growth stories, praises and thanksgiving should be a part of Christian gatherings. However, some of these are not part of many services. When God's people don't share his good works, it robs him of glory and Christians can become complacent about sharing the gospel.
3. Paul says that God rewards his servants in proportion to their dedication, obedience and many (or few) good works. This is what is meant by reaping in proportion to how much is sown. However, the sowing must be done out of love for Jesus and obedience to the Holy Spirit. God knows what motivates of our hearts and he will judge our good deeds accurately. Those good deeds done for selfish reasons will not be rewarded. (Mt 7:21-23; 1 Cor 3:12-15)
4. Paul says that God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others. *When you receive money, food and other blessings, do you view these as strictly for yourself?* Paul says that we should view them as opportunities to share them. In this way, those in need are blessed and they also will give thanks and glorify God.
5. *What are some ways that you can show your love for God and his people by being a generous giver? How is this desire to give generously different from our human nature? How is it an amazing gift that glorifies God?*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

2 Corinthians 10

Look Beyond Surface Appearances (10:1-18)

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he. For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it. I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field that God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of the work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man’s territory. But, “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

1. Paul says that meekness is not weakness. Meekness is being confident with strength and conviction expressed through humility. This is the gentle and loving lifestyle that Jesus showed us. Some Corinthian Christians said that Paul was timid in person but bold in his writings. Paul hopes that he will not have to seem

harsh with those who need to repent and be corrected when he visits them. Being loud, passionate and a good speaker attracts people, but these traits can lead people into evil. *Can you think of some dynamic speakers whom people followed into evil practices and beliefs?*

2. Just because a person sounds good and speaks in ways that appeal to people, does not mean we should support them. This is why it is important to know the Bible so that we are not misled. (2 Tim 4:1-4)
3. Christians need to discover and use the spiritual gifts given them by the Holy Spirit. This service may be low profile and even anonymous. Christians are to use their gifts to please God and not to seek the applause or popularity of men. Paul warns the Corinthians that there are some who compare themselves to others. The measure of our success in serving Jesus must not depend upon comparing ourselves to others.
4. Paul says that God had assigned a place for him to proclaim the gospel. This “place” included Corinth and many other cities during his travels. It even extends to all of Christianity, through his writings which are part of the Bible. Jesus is our Lord and, he has given each Christian a time, place, talents and other abilities. Our lives represent a unique place and we must advance the kingdom of God where we are planted.
5. Paul had great success in spreading the gospel. He did not boast in this success because he knew that it was the work of the Holy Spirit. Any boasting about the number of people saved through his teaching, was due to God and not Paul. God does the saving and provides wisdom and growth, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
6. Christians are to serve to please and honor Jesus. Our desire should be to hear him say “Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Lk 19:11-27) If this is not our focus and desire, then we are in danger of becoming dependent upon what the world, the flesh and the devil desire for us. *Do you know of Christians who have fallen because they loved the things of this world more than Jesus?*

Off the Shelf
Sunday School Lesson
2 Corinthians 11

Beware of False Teachers (11:1-15)

I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed nothing, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way and will continue to do so. As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

1. Paul prepares his speakers by saying that he is going to inject some exaggeration into what he is about to tell them. He is doing this because he wants them to be faithful and devoted to Jesus. He is concerned that false teachers are corrupting their minds. They were too willing to be led by false teachers. There have been false teachers throughout history, who call Christians too narrow minded and confined by their beliefs in the authority of the Bible. *Can you name some of them and their false teachings?*
2. False teachers use deception to twist the teachings of the Bible. Paul uses the example of how Eve was deceived by Satan. *How did Satan twist God's truth and entice Eve to sin? (Gen 3:1-6)*
3. Paul admits that he is not as dynamic a speaker as some of the false teachers, but he has the knowledge and wisdom of God. Faithful and truthful preaching from the Bible are more important than being entertained. Some churches have put too much emphasis on music and other forms of "feel good" entertainment in order

to attract and keep members. The Holy Spirit burns within the hearts of born-again Christians in response to preaching the Bible. There are emotions that come from forms of entertainment. *Can you tell the difference?* (Lk 24:25-32)

4. Paul exaggerates to make a point when he says that he robbed other churches in order to have the means to serve the Corinthian Christians. He did not accept support from the Corinthian Christians. He is speaking this way to stress that he is not preaching the gospel to make money, as some false teachers were doing. His sincerity is expressed through self-sacrifice. Beware of false teachers who live in luxury and who desire power and influence from preaching.
5. Many false teachers claim to have revelations from God, that make them equal or even greater than the apostles. This is the basis for their authority and justifies their false teachings. Paul warns that anyone who does not accurately teach the Bible, is a servant of Satan. Satan's servants typically teach things about Jesus that are contrary or not found in the Bible. They may sound logical and appealing, but they are evil. They have rejected or altered the gospel and so they are promoting anti-Christ philosophies. (1 Jn 4:1-3)
6. Teaching the Bible is to be done with reverence and humility. Those who teach inaccurate ideas will be punished. This is why the Bible says that not many should teach. The ability to teach from the Bible is a gift from God. Teaching must be done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There are some sincere Christian leaders who are not born-again and who will not be saved by their good deeds. (Mt 7:21-23; Jas 3:1)

Suffering for the Gospel (11:16-33)

I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open

sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from the Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger in the sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

1. False teachers were boasting about themselves in order to impress and influence Christians. Paul says this is wrong. It is foolishness. However, Paul is willing to indulge in boasting, if it will convince them of the superior nature of his credentials. Christians still tend to choose pastors and listen to Christian preachers based on their credentials, success in growing membership and their appearance and ability to speak well.
2. *How do false teachers enslave, exploit and take advantage of their followers?*
3. Paul suffered many physical trials, but he persevered in preaching the gospel. He also suffered because he was concerned about the Christians in the churches he founded. He considered them to be like his children, so he suffered when he heard of their sins and spiritual weakness. (2 Cor 6:11-13; Gal 4:19-20) *How do these things differ from the tendencies of false teachers or those who are peddling the gospel for their personal benefit?*
4. Paul said that he would prefer to boast about his weaknesses. He then gives an example of how he snuck out of Damascus to avoid being arrested. This was early in Paul's ministry and he probably was not proud of this cowardly and humiliating escape. Christians are imperfect sinners saved by God's choice.
5. Spiritual growth brings the knowledge of the depths of our sinfulness and increasing wonder at the great love and mercy of God. Christian leaders must be spiritually mature. They must not be proud or consider themselves to be better than others. The awareness of the gravity of their depravity, keeps them humble and willing to confess and repent of sins. False teachers are sometimes easy to spot, because they act like kings or dictators. Their words are law and they do not take criticism or correction. *Do you know of some false teachers like this?*

Off the Shelf
Sunday School Lesson
2 Corinthians 12

Exalted and Humbling Experiences (12:1-10)

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

1. Paul prepares his speakers by saying that he is going to inject some exaggeration into what he is about to tell them. He is doing this because he wants them to be faithful and devoted to Jesus. He is concerned that false teachers are corrupting their minds. They were too willing to be led by false teachers. There have been false teachers throughout history, who call Christians too narrow minded and confined by their beliefs in the authority of the Bible. *Can you name some of them and their false teachings?*
2. False teachers use deception to twist the teachings of the Bible. Paul uses the example of how Eve was deceived by Satan. *How did Satan twist God’s truth and entice Eve to sin? (Gen 3:1-6)*
3. Paul admits that he is not as dynamic a speaker as some of the false teachers, but he has the knowledge and wisdom of God. Faithful and truthful preaching from

the Bible is more important than being entertained. Some churches have put too much emphasis on music and other forms of “feel good” entertainment, to attract and keep members. The Holy Spirit burns within the hearts of born-again Christians in response to preaching the Bible. There are emotions that come from forms of entertainment that can become a substitute for the leading of the Holy Spirit. *Can you tell the difference?* (Lk 24:25-32)

4. Paul exaggerates to make a point when he says that he robbed other churches in order to have the means to serve the Corinthian Christians. He did not accept support from the Corinthian Christians. He is speaking this way to stress that he is not preaching the gospel to make money, as some false teachers were doing. His sincerity is expressed through self-sacrifice. Beware of false teachers who live in luxury and who desire power and influence from preaching.
5. Many false teachers claim to have revelations from God that appear to make them equal or even greater than the apostles. This is the basis for their authority and justifies their false teachings. Paul warns that anyone, who does not accurately teach the Bible, is a servant of Satan. Satan’s servants typically teach things about Jesus that are contrary or not found in the Bible. They may sound logical and appealing, but they are evil. They have rejected or altered the gospel and, in doing so, they are promoting anti-Christ philosophies. (1 Jn 4:1-3)
6. Teaching the Bible is to be done with reverence and humility. Those who teach inaccurate ideas will be punished. This is why the Bible says that not many should teach. The ability to teach from the Bible is a gift from God. Teaching must be done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There are some sincere Christian leaders who are not born-again and who will not be saved by their good deeds. (Mt 7:21-23; Jas 3:1)

Foolishness to Show Foolishness (12:11-21)

I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing. The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance. How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by

trickery! Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent you? I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not act in the same spirit and follow the same course? Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

1. Paul reminds them that God has confirmed his apostleship, through miracles and other supernatural actions, which they witnessed. The only thing in which the Corinthian Christians might be considered to be lacking is that Paul did not accept any support from them. Another sign of apostleship is seeing the risen Jesus. (Mt 10:1-4; 1 Cor 15:1-8)
2. Paul says that he loves them as if they were his children and he is willing to sacrifice himself for them. He also points out that he sent Titus to them, because of his care for them. The brothers that he sent to them did not exploit them but strengthened them in their faith. *Have you done things for others because you love them? Have you experienced a lack of respect and appreciation, or even rejection when you sacrificed for others?* Paul felt this kind of pain, but he did not stop loving them. *How is this like the love that God has for us?*
3. Paul warns them that his next visit may not be pleasant unless they repent of their sexual sins. Those who continue to sin after repeated attempts at correction, must be expelled from the church. Refusal to repent is a sign that these people are not born-again. Their continued presence will corrupt the church. (1 Cor 5:9-11, 6:9-10)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

2 Corinthians 13

Examine Yourself (13:1-14)

This will be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of

two or three witnesses.” I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 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. Examine whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that we have not failed the test. Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in the use of my authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down. Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints send their greetings. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

1. Paul repeats a Biblical principle that accusations in matters requiring discipline or judgment, must be based on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (Dt 19:15) This practice requires witnesses to take a public stand, which puts their reputation on the line. Multiple witnesses are needed to bring credibility to the charges against the accused. It is a serious matter to accuse someone of sin. (Ex 20:16) *Why is it dangerous to gossip?*
2. Paul has repeatedly warned those who were practicing sexual immoral acts to repent and stop. He now warns that he will bring discipline, if they continue to ignore his warnings. God is patient, but he will bring judgment for sins if there is no repentance. Loving kindness and patience must not be confused with acceptance or weakness. God will punish those who persist in sins without repentance. (Heb 10:26-31)
3. Paul says that those who persist in sin may not be born-again. The presence of the Holy Spirit within believers brings a change of thinking and actions. If this is not happening, it could be a sign that a person is not saved. This is why Paul tells those who persist in sin to examine themselves.
4. Christians are to aim for perfection. We realize that we cannot achieve this. However, being willing to try means that we are sensitive and obedient to the

leading of the Holy Spirit. This will result in becoming more like Christ. (Col 3:12; 1 Th 4:1-8; 1 Pet 1:13-16, 2:9)

5. Paul says that Christians are to be unified in their thinking and live in peace. This requires active seeking and submission to the mind of God, as revealed through the Bible and prayer. *Why is this difficult?*
6. It is good for Christians to greet one another with affection and respect. This might be a hug, kiss or handshake. However, this must be proper and not something that is sexual. *How do you show affection to family members?*