

# SECOND CORINTHIANS

## Chapter 2

**<sup>1</sup> So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. <sup>2</sup> For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.**

**2:1** *another painful visit.* The Greek text reads: “I determined not to come to you again in sorrow.” Two interpretations are possible: 1. not to come again, and this time in sorrow, or 2. not to come, again in sorrow. If the second is correct, Paul had already made one painful visit to Corinth, and he wanted to avoid another such visit, though he was ready to exert his authority should it prove necessary (cf. 13:2). The occasion of this former painful visit is not known to us. It could not have been his original visit to Corinth at the time when the church there was founded in response to the preaching of the gospel. Therefore he may have paid a second visit, which may be confirmed by 12:14; 13:1, where he seems to state that the visit he is now about to make will be his third. The second visit could have taken place between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians, though some hold that it occurred before 1 Corinthians was written. But the Greek text does not compel one to assume an intermediate painful visit. (CSB)

Paul’s second visit was to resolve conflicts. (TLSB)

**2:2** Only a positive response from the Corinthians could relieve his concerns. (TLSB)

**2:3–4** *I wrote as I did ... out of great distress and anguish.* This passage refers to a previous letter that had been sent to the Corinthians. The consensus of the church from the earliest times has been that this previous letter is 1 Corinthians. In more recent times, however, the hypothesis that the reference is to an intermediate letter, written after 1 Corinthians and before 2 Corinthians, has been widely accepted. Some advocates of this theory hold that the letter in question is now lost; others have identified it, in whole or in part, with the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians, contending that these chapters are out of harmony with the earlier ones and that they fit the description of a letter written “out of great distress and anguish.” There is, however, no historical evidence that the unity of 2 Corinthians was questioned or that its integrity was doubted prior to modern times. (CSB)

**2:4** Paul demonstrates both sincere motives for his work in Corinth and the willingness of the Gospel ministry to serve others for their sake. He contrasts his motives and message with that of the super-apostles (1Co 4:9–16; 2Co 11:13), who were actually false prophets.

**1:12–2:4** Paul defends his ministry to the Corinthians not according to the standards of the world but according to the gracious character of God’s message delivered through self-sacrificing servants. Sharing the Gospel message often exposes us as unworthy servants. In the

midst of the hardships that Gospel ministry brings in a sinful world, the confidence of Christ, His encouraging, sustaining, forgiving presence, is a constant blessing for those who trust Him (1:21). • Dear Jesus, even in the midst of the battles of life, Your love and Your grace not only sustain us, but they are also the solid ground from which we can always begin again. We trust in Your everlasting love. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Forgiveness for the Sinner*

**<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. <sup>7</sup> Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup> I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. <sup>9</sup> The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. <sup>10</sup> 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, <sup>11</sup> in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.**

**2:5–17** The Corinthian congregation had allowed sexually immoral behavior in their midst that was worse than the pagans.<sup>7</sup> It is unclear whether Paul is speaking of this person as the one who has grieved the congregation or whether there was another incident requiring a “painful visit” (v 1). One can be sure that the offense was public, serious, and required discipline. (TLSB)

**2:5–11** Speaks of a particular person who has been the cause of serious offense in Corinth and upon whom church discipline has been imposed. Paul admonishes the Corinthians that because the offender has shown genuine sorrow and repentance for his sin the punishment should be discontinued and he should be lovingly restored to their fellowship. Church discipline, important as it is, should not be allowed to develop into a form of graceless rigor in which there is no room for pardon and restoration. Some hold that the offense in question probably took place during Paul’s intermediate visit to Corinth (see note on v. 1) and was the occasion for his writing the severe letter demanding the punishment of the offender (see note on vv. 3–4). Another view is that the reference is to the incident recorded in 1Co 5. The case of “incest” certainly was a cause of serious offense in Corinth. (CSB)

**2:6** *punishment by the majority.* When sin is public, it reflects on the whole congregation. Some likely wanted the punishment to be even more severe. (TLSB)

**2:7** *forgive and comfort him.* The discipline had brought about repentance. Forgiveness and reconciliation are always the goal of discipline and punishment. Forgiveness of sins, not perfection, is the chief characteristic of the Church. (TLSB)

*excessive sorrow.* Sorrow for sin correctly brings a deep sense of guilt and remorse, but to continue to criticize a remorseful person after repentance defeats discipline’s **2:8** *reaffirm*. The Gk *kyroo*, used of legal arrangements and covenants, can mean “enforce.” Restoration must be publicly confirmed.

**2:9** *test you*. Lit, “know your proof, your evidence” to see if you are faithful in this matter. (TLSB)

*obedient in everything*. The Corinthians had been obedient in the process of discipline. Paul wants them to be as faithful in forgiveness and restoration (cf Ps 103:12–13; Heb 10:17). (TLSB)

**2:10** *I also forgive*. Discipline was a shared exercise, so forgiveness was shared too. (TLSB)

*for your sake*. The exercise of discipline was not only for a person who sinned, but for the sake of the Church itself. They, too, were called to be faithful in discipline and forgiveness as Christ’s people. (TLSB)

**2:11** *outwitted by Satan*. To misuse the process of discipline as some legalistic punishment or some method of humiliating a repentant sinner would turn Christ’s Church into a cesspool of self-righteousness. Paul warns against this satanic twist. (TLSB)

*his designs*. Satan plans and purposes to destroy congregations. “He provokes the world against us, fans and stirs the fire, so that he may hinder and drive us back, cause us to fall, and again bring us under his power” (LC III 63). (TLSB)

**2:5–11** The goal of church discipline is the restoration of the person. Paul calls the Corinthians, who have been diligent in punishment, to be even more diligent in forgiveness. When disciplining another, we often are tempted to do so legalistically, as if the person has to earn our forgiveness. Such an attitude actually destroys grace, both in the repentant believer and in us. To the one who is truly sorry for sin, we are to forgive as Christ forgives us and to remember the sin no more. • Dear Lord, give us wisdom to speak Your words of judgment or grace always for the sake of our fellow believer and not for our own satisfaction or self-righteousness. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Ministers of the New Covenant*

<sup>12</sup> Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. <sup>16</sup> To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? <sup>17</sup> 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.

**2:12** *when I went to Troas*. Paul had traveled up from Ephesus to Troas, a city on the Aegean coast opposite the island of Tenedos, hoping to find Titus there and to receive news from him about the Corinthian church. But Titus, who, presumably, Paul knew would be following the same route in reverse, did not arrive in Troas; so Paul, anxious

for news from Corinth, “went on to Macedonia” (v. 13), perhaps to the city of Philippi. (CSB)

Paul stopped on his third missionary journey, after leaving Ephesus (Ac 20:1–12), on his way to Macedonia, AD 55. (TLSB)

*door was opened.* A positive reception of the Gospel was feasible. (TLSB)

**2:13** *my spirit was not at rest.* Paul was concerned about the Corinthian problems. (TLSB)

*my brother.* Cf. 8:23. Paul held Titus in high esteem; he entrusted Titus with the organization of the collection of funds in Corinth for the relief of the poverty-stricken Christians of Jerusalem (8:6), and he chose him to bear this letter to the Corinthian Christians (8:16–17). (CSB)

Paul’s companion who shared in the mission work, esp at Corinth (8:16–17) (TLSB)

**2:14–15** *us ... we.* Paul switches from his specific calling to speak broadly about God’s work in the lives of believers. (TLSB)

*fragrance ... the aroma of Christ.* Temple sacrifices produced smells we would associate with grilling meat or cooking bread. The pleasing aroma of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross covers the stench of our sin. John Chrysostom: “We are then, as it were, a Royal censer, breathing withersoever we go of the heavenly ointment and the spiritual sweet savor” (*NPNF* 1 12:301). (TLSB)

**2:14** At this point Paul breaks off the narrative of his itinerary and in a characteristic manner allows his spontaneous spirit to carry him into a lengthy digression (the narrative is not resumed until 7:5). The digression, however, is quite relevant to the main tenor of this letter, for it is an immensely rich outpouring of triumphant faith in praise of the unfailing adequacy of the grace of God for every conceivable situation, no matter how threatening and destructive it may seem to be. (CSB)

*leads us in triumphal procession.* The imagery is that of a Roman triumph in which the victorious general would lead his soldiers and the captives they had taken in festive procession, while the people watched and applauded and the air was filled with the sweet smell released by the burning of spices in the streets. So the Christian, called to spiritual warfare, is triumphantly led by God in Christ, and it is through him that God spreads everywhere the “fragrance” of the knowledge of Christ. (CSB)

**2:16** *the smell of death ... the fragrance of life.* As the gospel aroma is released in the world through Christian testimony, it is always sweet-smelling, even though it may be differently received. The two ultimate categories of mankind are “those who are being saved and those who are perishing” (v. 15). To the latter, testifying Christians are the smell of death, not because the gospel message has become evil-smelling or death-dealing, but because in rejecting the life-giving grace of God unbelievers choose death

for themselves. To those who welcome the gospel of God's grace, Christians with their testimony are the fragrance of life. (CSB)

*death to death.* To focus on the deadly character of a sacrifice or a triumphal military procession is to fail to see how that sacrifice gives life. *life to life.* Paul's life of sacrifice brings life to unbelievers. (TLSB)

*who is equal to such a task?* For the answer see 3:5. (CSB)

Paul was personally inadequate for the monumental task of apostolic ministry (i.e., being Christ's representative, preaching both judgment and forgiveness in Christ's name). This did not destroy his confidence in Christ and the certainty of his calling in Christ's name. "We should be certain about and agree with the promise that God's Word preached and heard is <truly> an office and work of the Holy Spirit. He is certainly effective and works in our hearts by them" (FC SD II 56). (TLSB)

**2:17** *we do not peddle the word of God for profit.* Paul may be referring to false teachers who had infiltrated the Corinthian church and who artfully presented themselves in a persuasive manner, but their chief interest was to take money from gullible church members. Or he may be referring to traveling charlatans in Greek society who promised to teach the way of "success" to any person who paid cash in advance (see note on 11:7). Paul, by contrast, had preached the gospel sincerely and free of charge, taking care not to be a financial burden to the Corinthian believers (see 11:7–12; 1Co 9:7–15). (CSB)

Paul contrasts his ministry with those who peddle God's Word for personal profit. He might also be differentiating his gathering of the offerings for the saints (8:4; 9:5) with the actions of the false apostles (cf 11:12–15). (TLSB)

*commissioned by God.* Paul was authorized by and accountable to God Himself for what he proclaimed to the Corinthians (see "apostle," p 1901; cf Ac 9:1–15). (TLSB)

*speaking in Christ.* Accountable to the purpose and assurance of Christ and His message. (TLSB)

**2:12–17** Paul's spirit is restless and overwhelmed in the circumstances of his ministry. Nonetheless, he is confident that Christ will accomplish His work for the Corinthians. As Christians, we often feel the very real weight of representing Christ to others. Our worries, sins, and frailties can overwhelm us. We can take heart that Christ Jesus is always sufficient and that His message of forgiveness for us is also a sweet fragrance to all who trust in Him. • Dear Lord, give us sincere hearts to look honestly at ourselves, so we may never take Your grace for granted, and that we might be a sweet aroma of grace to others in Your name. Amen. (TLSB)