

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY IN CORINTH^a

Greeting?

1 From Paul, an apostle^b of Christ Jesus by God's will, and from Timothy our brother. To the community of God that's in Corinth, together with all the holy ones who are in all of Achaia.^c ☩ Grace and peace to you, from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ!

God Comforts Us in All Our Troubles

☩ Bless^d God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion, and the God of all encouragement. ☩ God's the One who encourages us in all our troubles.^e That way, we can encourage people in all kinds of trouble, thanks to the encouragement that we ourselves have received from God. ☩ Because just as Christ's sufferings are overflowing in us, through Christ our encouragement is also overflowing. ☩ So if we're experiencing trouble, it's for your encouragement and salvation. And if we're being encouraged, it's to give you encouragement,^f as you endure the same sufferings that we're experiencing. ☩ And our hope for you is

^a As mentioned in the notes on 1 Corinthians, I suspect that we have, within our two canonical Corinthian letters, nearly four complete letters that Paul wrote to them. Here is the likely sequence within the materials that we have: 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1 would be an excerpt from the earliest of the four letters. Then comes 1 Corinthians, which makes reference to that letter (see 1 Cor. 5:9–11). Then comes “the painful letter” that Paul refers to more than once in 2 Corinthians (see 2 Cor. 7:6–13). Some pages from that letter seem to me to have been inserted between the pages of 1 Corinthians, and others seem to have been gathered at the end of 2 Corinthians. If you remove the two “painful letter” portions from 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:7–21; 9:1–18), the text closes up without a seam on either side in each case. The following sections, in my opinion, may approximate the original contents and order of the “painful letter”: 2 Cor. 10:1–12:13; 1 Cor. 9:1–18; 2 Cor. 12:14–13:6; 1 Cor. 4:7–21; 2 Cor. 13:7–14. After the painful letter, Paul writes a fourth letter which makes up the bulk of 2 Corinthians: chs. 1–9, excepting 6:14–7:1.

^b See “Bible Words.” Paul's selection as an apostle, unlike “the twelve,” came after Christ's resurrection (see Gal. 1:11–24; Acts 9:1–16).

^c Prn. *a-kay-a*.

^d Lit. “Blessed be.”

^e Traditionally: “tribulation.” The troubles Paul refers to here and below are those of persecution for one's faith.

^f Lit. “it's for the sake of your encouragement being accomplished.”

solid. Because we know that if^a we're partners in suffering, we're equally partners in encouragement.

Explanation of Setbacks and Changes in Travel Plans?

After all, brothers and sisters, we want you to know^b about the trouble we've faced in Asia—how we were completely weighed down, beyond our strength. It was to the point that we even gave up hope of coming out of it alive.^c But we've been carrying a death sentence inside so that we won't have confidence in ourselves, but in God, who raises the dead. He has saved us from some really horrible deaths,^d and is going to save us.^e God is where our hope lies.^f And he's going to save us again, with you helping us in prayer. That way, thanksgiving will be offered by many people for God's gift to us, through many people's prayers on our^g behalf.

Because we can proudly affirm the testimony of our conscience:^h that we're not operating in human wisdom, but in God's grace. And we've lived in the world in the wholeheartednessⁱ and sincerity of God—and especially in our relationship with you. After all, we're not writing you anything that you can't both read and understand. And I hope that you'll understand completely, just as you've understood us to a certain extent so far.^j Because on the day of our Lord Jesus, you're going to be proud of us, just like we're going to be proud of you.^k

And I'd wanted to come to you with that confidence earlier, so you'd have a second chance.^l I was going to go by way of you to Macedonia,^m then back again from Macedonia to you, and then, with your help, on to Judea. So that's what I wanted to do. Did I suddenly turn fickle? Or do I make plans for my own selfish purposes, so that I can say “yes, yes” one minute, and “no, no” the next?ⁿ No, God's my witness:^o what we've said to you is not “yes” and “no.” After all, consider God's son Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—myself and

^a Lit. “as.”

^b Lit. “We don't want you to be unaware,” a standard phrase people used in letters when about to give some news.

^c Lit. “we despaired even of living.”

^d Lit. “from such great deaths” (some mss have “such a great death”).

^e Many mss have “and saves us.”

^f Lit. “...is going to save us, in whom we've hoped.”

^g Some mss have “your.” It's a complicated sentence, and I think the copyist got mixed up.

^h Lit. “For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience.”

ⁱ Some mss have “holiness.”

^j Lit. “...completely, just as you've understood us in part.”

^k Paul's writing has quickly become intensely emotional, as it will be in a number of places in this letter. He's very upset that while he's been out in Asia risking his life for the good news, certain people have come along and tried to convince the Corinthians that he is a defective apostle.

^l Or, following other mss, “so you'd enjoy a second visit from me.”

^m Prn. mass-a-doe-nee-a.

ⁿ Lit. “Or the things I intend, do I intend according to the flesh, so that with me it'll be ‘yes, yes’ and ‘no, no?’”

^o Lit. “But as God is faithful: our word to you is not ‘yes’ and ‘no.’” Paul is swearing by God's faithfulness that what he says is true.

Silvanus^a and Timothy. He didn't turn out to be "yes" and "no": far from it! The answer turned out to be "yes" in Christ. ²⁰Because all of God's promises are "yes" in him. So thanks to Christ, the "Amen" to God's glory comes from us. ²¹And God's the One who's confirming us—with you—in Christ. And he's the one who has anointed us ²²and sealed us, and has given us the first installment of the Spirit in our hearts. ²³And on my life before God,^b I testify that it was to spare you that I decided I wouldn't come to Corinth after all. ²⁴We're not going to dominate^c your faith. No, we're working together with you for your happiness, because you're standing in faith.

Paul's Decision to Wait before Visiting the Corinthians

2 So^d I made a decision for myself: I wouldn't make another painful visit to you. ²After all, if I hurt you, who's going to cheer me up, except the one who's been hurt by me? ³And that's exactly what I wrote, so that I wouldn't come and be hurt by the very ones who should make me happy.^e As I thought of you all, I was convinced that my happiness was in everybody's happiness.^f ⁴After all, I wrote you in a lot of distress and heartbreak—with a lot of tears. It was the opposite of my intention for you to be hurt—I wanted for you to know how very deeply I love you.^g

⁵Well, if somebody's hurt somebody, they haven't hurt me. No, to a certain extent—not to exaggerate—he's hurt you all. ⁶The certain person has gotten enough punishment from the majority. ⁷So now it'd be better for you to forgive the person and encourage him. That way the person won't be sort of overwhelmed by too much grief. ⁸So I'm asking you to confirm your love to him. ⁹After all, that's exactly why I wrote: so I'd know what you're made of—if you'd be obedient all the way. ¹⁰But if you forgive somebody for something, so do I. Because the thing I'm forgiving them for—if there is something to forgive them for—I'm forgiving it for your sake, in the presence of Christ. ¹¹That way, we won't get conned by Satan. Because we know all about^h his ways of thinking.

^a That is, Silas.

^b Again Paul is swearing that he's telling the truth.

^c Or "It's not as though we're dominating."

^d Lit. "For."

^e Chapters 10–13 of our canonical 2 Corinthians are probably part of the "painful letter" Paul is going to refer to in 2:4. When he says, "that's exactly what I wrote," I think he's referring to 2 Cor. 10:2; 12:20–21; 13:10, and possibly also 1 Cor. 4:21, if 1 Cor. 4:7–21 is also part of the painful letter. See the note at the end of 1 Cor. 4:6 for the reasons I suspect that 1 Cor. 4:7–21 also belongs to the painful letter.

^f Lit. "being convinced concerning you all that my joy is the joy of you all."

^g Lit. "...tears—not at all so you'd be hurt, but so that you'd know the love that I have abundantly for you."

^h Lit. "for we're not ignorant."

12 I'd gone to Troas to preach the good news of Christ, and the Lord opened a door for me.^a 13 But I didn't have any rest in my spirit about the fact that I hadn't found my brother Titus.^b So I said goodbye to them and went off to Macedonia.

14 Well, thank God for always leading^c us in the victory procession in Christ—and for spreading^d the scent of the knowledge of him through us in every location. 15 Because whether we're among people who are being saved or lost, we're the wonderful scent of Christ in the presence of God.^e 16 For some it's the smell of death and leads to death, but for others it's the smell of life and leads to life. And who's adequate for all this? 17 After all, we're not making a profit on God's word, like a lot of people are. Just the opposite: we're coming out of sincerity. In Christ, we're speaking from God and in front of God.

Servants of the New Covenant

3 Are we starting to try to get your acceptance again?^f Or maybe we don't need letters of recommendation to or from you, like some people do. 2 You're our letter, written on our hearts, where everybody can see it and read it.^g 3 You're on display because you're Christ's letter, which is in our care.^h It's not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God—not written on stone tablets, but on human hearts.ⁱ 4 Through Christ, that's the sort of confidence we have in front of God. 5 It's not that we're adequate on our own^j to consider anything as coming from us. Far from it: our adequacy is from God. 6 And he's the One who has made us adequate as ministers of the new covenant—a covenant not of text,^k but of the Spirit. Because the text^l kills, but the Spirit brings to life.

7 Now, the ministry of death, engraved on stones, came with glory. So much so, that Israelites^m couldn't look at Moses' face, because of the glory of his face—which was fading!ⁿ 8 If that's true, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come with glory? 9 Because if there's glory in the ministry of condemnation, then

^a Lit. "and a door was opened for me by/in the Lord." When Paul says "Lord," he most often means Jesus.

^b When Paul says "brother," he almost always means "Christian friend."

^c Lit. "But thanks be to God, to the One who always leads us."

^d Lit. "and who manifests."

^e I think Paul is thinking of Christ, and those who are in Christ, as a kind of incense offering to God.

^f Lit. "to commend ourselves again." Chapters 10–13 of 2 Corinthians contain an extended appeal for the Corinthians to stop looking down on Paul and trading him for "new, improved" apostles. I think chs. 10–13 belong to a letter Paul had sent before to the main portion of 2 Corinthians. If that's correct, he's now saying he's not going to defend himself in that way again.

^g Lit. "...our hearts, recognized and read by all people."

^h Lit. "administered by us."

ⁱ Lit. "hearts of flesh." See Exod. 24:12; 31:18; 34:1; Deut. 9:10–11; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26.

^j Lit. "adequate of ourselves."

^k Lit. "not of letter." By the "covenant of the letter," Paul means the Ten Commandments.

^l Lit. "letter."

^m Lit. "the children of Israel."

ⁿ Lit. "disappearing."

the ministry that enables people to live right is going to have far more glory.^a
 10 Because even what *has* been glorious, isn't glorious anymore, when set alongside this exceptional glory. 11 After all, if what disappears came with glory, won't there be much more glory in what lasts?^b

12 So since we have this kind of hope, we're very bold—13 not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face. That way, the Israelites^c couldn't stare at the tail end of the glory that was disappearing. 14 But their ways of thinking were stubborn.^d
 15 After all, the same veil still lies over the reading of the old covenant to this day. It's never been lifted.^e Because in Christ it's done away with—yet to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. 16 But “whenever one turns to the Lord, the veil gets removed.”^f 17 And “the Lord” is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there's freedom. 18 And we're all there with unveiled faces, reflecting^g the glory of the Lord. And we're being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory! It's all from Lord, the Spirit.

We are Treasures in Containers Made of Clay

4 So, since we have this ministry thanks to^h God's mercy, we don't give up. 1 Instead, we renounce the secrecy of shameful behavior. We don't live in deceitfulness, and we don't distort God's word into a lie. Just the opposite: in openness and truthfulness,ⁱ we recommend ourselves to everybody's conscience in front of God. 2 And if the good news we bring is still veiled, it's veiled around those who are being lost. 3 The god of this world^j is among them, and has made faithless people's ways of thinking blind. That way, they never clearly see^k the bright light of the good news of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 4 After all, we're not preaching ourselves: we're preaching Jesus Christ as Lord. And we position ourselves as your servants^l because of Jesus.^m 5 After all, the same God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness”ⁿ is the One who has shined in our hearts. So our hearts are lit up by^o the knowledge of the glory of God in the face

^a Lit. “much more does the ministry of righteousness go beyond it in glory.”

^b Lit. “For if the disappearing has been through glory, much more what remains is/will be in glory.”

^c Lit. “the children of Israel.”

^d Or “hardened.” See Ps. 95:8ff.; Rom. 11:25ff. Paul wrote Romans very shortly after he wrote the main portion of 2 Corinthians.

^e Lit. “Because up to this day, the same veil remains over the reading of the old covenant, not lifted.”

^f Paraphrasing Exod. 34:34. Paul is finding a number of uses for the veil metaphor.

^g Or, possibly, “viewing in a mirror” (see 1 Cor. 13:12).

^h Lit. “through.”

ⁱ Lit. “In openness of truth.”

^j This is a reference to the devil.

^k Lit. “...blind, so they won't clearly see.”

^l Or “slaves.”

^m Some mss have “through Jesus.” Some mss add “Christ,” but that's probably not original here.

ⁿ Paraphrasing Gen. 1:3.

^o Lit. “...hearts, for the radiance of.”

of Christ. 7But we have this treasure in containers made of clay. That way, the ultimate power will be God's, and not from us.

8Everywhere we're under pressure,
but we're not crushed.
We're at the end of our rope,
but not in despair.
9We're persecuted,
but not abandoned.
We're knocked down,
but not destroyed.

10We always carry the death of Jesus with us in our bodies. That way, the life of Jesus can also be manifested in our bodies. 11Because we who are alive are constantly being handed over^a to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus can be manifested in our mortal bodies.^b 12So death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

13But we have the same spirit of faith as in the scripture,^c "I believed, so I spoke."^d We believe, so we speak. 14We know that the One who raised Jesus^e is going to raise us with Jesus too—and bring us to him along with you. 15Because it's all for you,^f so that as grace expands to more and more people, thanks will overflow and God will get more glory.^g

16That's why we don't give up. Not at all! Even if our outer self is falling apart,^h our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17Our light, short-lived trouble is building in us an absolutely unsurpassed and eternal level of glory.ⁱ 18Because what's visible is temporary, but the things that can't be seen are eternal.

Our Hope of an Eternal Home

5 After all, we know that if our home on the earth, this "tent" of ours, is taken down, we have a building from God as our home. That one's not made by human hands—it's eternal in the heavens.^j 2And of course, in *this* home we groan. We're yearning to put on, over it, our building from heaven. 3If we can just be

^a Or "betrayed."

^b Lit. "mortal flesh."

^c Lit. "according to what is written."

^d Ps. 116:10.

^e Many mss have "the Lord Jesus." But sleepy copyists often added the expected "Lord."

^f By "you," I think he means all the Gentiles in the world, not just the Corinthians.

^g Lit. "...overflow to the glory of God." See "Bible Words" under "glory."

^h Lit. "decaying."

ⁱ Lit. "is accomplishing a more and more unsurpassed eternal weight of glory in us."

^j Paul is probably talking about the true "Temple" of God's complete presence. We, in our "tents," want to be inside that temple.

clothed, we won't feel naked!^a 4Yes, while we're in this tent we groan under a burden. Because we don't want to undress—we want to put something on over what we're wearing. That way, what's mortal will be swallowed up by life. 5And the One who has prepared us for exactly that is God, who has given us the Spirit as a down payment.

6So we always keep up our courage, knowing that while we're at home in our body, we're not home with the Lord. 7Because we live our lives^b by faith, not by sight. 8And we also take courage as we sense that^c it's better to be away from the home of our body and to be home with the Lord. 9That's why we aspire, whether at home or away from home, to please him.^d 10After all, we all have to appear in front of Christ's judgment bench.^e And each person is going to get paid back^f for the things they've done while they were in their body,^g whether good or bad.

Why We Preach the Good News of Jesus Christ?

11So, because we know what it is to respect the Lord,^h we try to win people over. And what we're doing is obvious to God. But I also hope that it'llⁱ be obvious to your conscience. 12We're not trying to get in your good graces all over again!^j far from it. We're giving you an opportunity to be proud of us—so that you'll have something to say to those who base their pride on appearances, rather on the heart. 13Because if we're out of our minds, it's for God; if we're in our right minds, it's for you. 14Because Christ's love compels us, when we conclude that One died on behalf of everyone. That implies that everybody died.^k 15And when he died for everyone, it was so that those who live would not live for themselves anymore, but for the One who died and rose on their behalf.

^a Lit. "find ourselves naked."

^b Or "we conduct ourselves"; lit. "we walk."

^c Lit. "...courage, and we consider that."

^d Lit. "to be pleasing to him." The "him" here is the Lord Jesus (see 4:14). When Paul says "the Lord," he almost always means Jesus.

^e This is the language of the courtroom. We "have to appear," and Christ as judge sits at "the bench."

^f Lit. "so that each person can get paid back."

^g Lit. "the things done through the body."

^h Lit. "So because we know the fear of the Lord"; for this expression, see e.g. Prov. 2:5.

ⁱ Lit. "we'll."

^j Or "We're not recommending ourselves to you again." I think he's referring to an appeal he and Timothy made in a recent letter, many pages of which we see in 2 Cor. 10–13.

^k In other words, Christ died everybody's death for them, so now they're counted as dead. Paul is going to develop this idea at some length in his letter to the community in Rome (see Rom. 5:12–6:14; 7:1–6), which he wrote perhaps a few weeks after he wrote this.

Messengers of Reconciliation with God

16So from now on, we don't look at^a anybody on the basis of their outward condition,^b Even though we once saw Christ that way,^c we don't see^d him that way anymore. 17The conclusion is that if somebody's in Christ, they're a new creation. The old is gone; now the new has come. 18And it's all from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. And he has given us the ministry of reconciliation. 19Just as God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself—not counting their offenses against them—so he has also put the message^e of reconciliation in us. 20So we're ambassadors on Christ's behalf. It's as though God were pleading through us, when we ask on behalf of Christ: come back^f to God!

21God appointed the One who never sinned
To be a sin offering on our behalf,
So that in him
We would come to embody God's just character.^g

6 And so, working together with God, we urge you not to accept the grace of God for nothing. 2Because it says,

I heard you at a good moment,
And I rescued you on a day for salvation.^h

Look—now is the right moment; now is the day for salvation. 3We're not putting any obstacle in front of anybody, so our ministry won't come under criticism. 4No, as God's servants, we try to stay in everybody's good graces.ⁱ We have a lot of endurance^j—in troubles, in struggles, in difficulties,^k 5in beatings, in imprisonment, in riots, in hard work, in sleeplessness, in hunger, 6in sincerity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, 7in truthfulness,^l in the power of God. We use^m the weapons of justice and integrity

^a Lit. "know."

^b Lit. "according to the flesh."

^c Lit. "knew Christ according to the flesh."

^d Lit. "recognize."

^e One very early ms has "good news."

^f Lit. "be reconciled."

^g Traditionally: "God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become God's righteousness in him." In both the Hebrew and the Greek OT, the single word "sin" is used as the official term for "sin offering." Paul is being poetic here when he repeats the Greek OT word that means both "sin" and "sin offering." For a developed statement of this idea, see Rom. 8:1-10 (esp. v. 3), which he wrote perhaps a few weeks after he wrote this.

^h Isa. 49:8.

ⁱ Lit. "commending ourselves to all."

^j Lit. "In much endurance."

^k Or "in moments of anguish."

^l Lit. "in word of truth."

^m "We use": lit. "Through."

in each hand,^a through honor^b and dishonor, through slander and praise, sometimes seen as liars, sometimes seen as truthful, sometimes unknown, and sometimes recognized. Sometimes we're just about dying, but see—we're still alive. We're beaten but not killed. ¹⁰We're in pain yet we celebrate; we're poor yet we make lots of people rich; we have nothing, yet we possess everything.

We are Not the Ones Holding Back—You Are

¹¹We've opened up to you,^c Corinthians. We've laid our hearts wide open. ¹²We're not shutting you out—you're feeling shut out because of your own emotions.^d ¹³Fair is fair! I'm saying this to you as my children: open your hearts to us too.^e

You are God's Temple (see 1 Cor. 5:9-11)

[[¹⁴Don't get mismatched with^f unbelievers. After all, what do right living and lawlessness have in common? What kind of relationship can there be between light and darkness? ¹⁵And what agreement is there between Christ and Beliar?^g What commonality is there between faith and unbelief? ¹⁶And what agreement can there be between the Temple of God and idols? After all, we^h are the temple of the Living God. It's just like God said:

I am going to live among them and walk among them,
 And I'm going to be their God,
 And they're going to be my people.ⁱ
¹⁷So come out from among them,
 And be separate, says the Lord,
 And don't touch what's filthy.
 And then I'll take you in,^j
¹⁸And I'll be a father to you,
 And you'll be sons and daughters to me,^k
 Says the Lord, the All Powerful.

^a Lit. "with the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and the left."

^b Lit. "glory."

^c Lit. "Our mouth is open towards you."

^d Lit. "You're not getting squeezed out by us; you're getting squeezed out by your emotions." I believe Paul is saying that they are "projecting" on him what they are feeling. They think he has withdrawn from the relationship; he says he's still there and is still open, and any restriction is on their side.

^e The following material in double brackets (6:14-7:1) appears to me to be a portion of the earliest of Paul's known letters to the Corinthians, which he refers to in 1 Cor. 5:9-11. If you take this section out, the text closes up seamlessly on either side. Here is the reconnected flow of the argument: we've been open with you—we've made lots of room for you in our hearts (6:11); we're not withdrawing—you are (6:12); since we've been so open, it's only fair that you should open your hearts to us (6:13); so make room for us in your hearts (7:2a).

^f Lit. "unequally yoked to."

^g This is a name for Satan, or the devil.

^h Some mss have "you."

ⁱ Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27.

^j Isa. 52:11; Ezek. 20:34, 41.

^k 2 Sam. 7:8, 14; Isa. 43:6; Jer. 31:9.

7 So since we have these promises, dear friends, let's cleanse ourselves from every kind of physical and spiritual pollution. Let's be completely holy, in reverence for God.^a]]

Let us Back into Your Hearts?

Let us in.^b We haven't been unfair to anyone, we haven't corrupted anyone, and we haven't tricked anyone out of their money. I'm not saying that to criticize—because, as I said before, you're in our hearts, to live together and die together. I have a lot of confidence in you. I'm very proud of you. I'm full of encouragement, and I'm overflowing with joy in the midst of our troubles.

Paul's Relief That Their Hearts Have Changed

Because when we got to Macedonia, we didn't get any physical rest^c—just the opposite. We were in all kinds of trouble: we had conflicts outside, and fears inside. But God, who encourages people who are down,^d encouraged us. Titus arrived!^e And it wasn't just his arrival that encouraged us, but also the encouragement that he felt about you. He was telling us about your yearning, your sorrow, your passionate feelings on my behalf. I was so much happier when I heard that!^f Because even if I did hurt you in that letter, I don't regret it, although I did at first.^g (After all,^h I see that the letter hurt you—even if just for a moment.) I'm happy now—not that you were hurt—but that you were hurt into a change of heart.ⁱ Because you were hurt with God's kind of pain,^j so that you weren't harmed by us at all. Because God's kind of pain brings about a change of heart^k that leads to salvation without regret—but the world's pain leads to death.^l After all, look at exactly what God's kind of pain^m accomplished in you: not just active commitment, not just determination to clear yourselves, not just anger, not just alarm, but also yearning, passion, and action to right the wrong. In every way, you've shown yourselves to be innocent in this thing.ⁿ So if I did write to you that way, it wasn't because of the person who had done wrong, and it wasn't because of the person who was wronged. It was so that your active

^a Lit. "let's cleanse/purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit, completing sanctification in reverence/fear of God."

^b Lit. "Make room for us."

^c Lit. "our flesh has no freedom [to relax]."

^d Or "humble."

^e Lit. "...encouraged us by the arrival of Titus."

^f Lit. "...my behalf, so that I rejoiced the more."

^g Lit. "although I regretted it."

^h Some mss lack the words "After all." They're implied in any case.

ⁱ Traditionally: "into repentance" (see "Bible Words").

^j Lit. "you were hurt according to God."

^k Traditionally: "to repentance."

^l Lit. "Because the pain that's according to God brings about repentance for salvation without regret, but the world's pain produces death."

^m Lit. "pain according to God."

ⁿ Lit. "in the matter," or "in the business."

commitment to us^a would be revealed to you in front of God. ¹³That's why we're encouraged.

In addition to this encouragement of ours, we were all the more happy that Titus was happy^b—that his spirit was at peace about you all. ¹⁴Because although I've bragged a bit about you to him, I haven't been ashamed. Not at all. We've been truthful in everything we've said to you about ourselves, and the positive things we said to Titus about you have also turned out to be just as true.^c ¹⁵And he keeps feeling better and better about the way you all listened to him, because he remembers how you welcomed him with fear and trembling.^d ¹⁶I'm happy to say that I'm completely confident in you.

News and Instructions about the Collection for Famine Relief in Israel (see 1 Cor. 16)

8 Brothers and sisters, we want to let you know about the grace of God that's been given to the communities in Macedonia. ¹In the midst of the intense testing of religious persecution,^e the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty have overflowed into wholehearted generosity on their part. ²Because they gave as much as they were able, and—as I can testify—beyond their ability, on their own initiative. ³They were asking us—really begging us—if they could join in the gift and the common effort of service to the holy ones.^f ⁴Although it wasn't what we expected, they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us, by God's will.^g ⁵The result was that we encouraged Titus (since he started it) to finish making up the gift with you. ⁶After all, you're overflowing with everything: faith, eloquence, knowledge, and active commitment—plus the love for one another that you've learned from us.^h So you should overflow in this gift too.

I'm not saying this as an order. I'm just testing out the genuineness of your love by telling you about the active commitment that others have shown. ⁷After all, you know the gift that our Lord Jesus Christ gave us: how he was rich, but he made himself poor, so that through his poverty you could become rich.

^a Lit. "on our behalf."

^b Lit. "we overflowed the more with joy over the joy of Titus."

^c Lit. "just as we've spoken all in truth to you, so our boast to Titus has turned out true." 2 Cor. 10–13 is probably part of the "painful letter" that Paul is discussing here, and he's referring to the fact that he resorted over and over in that letter to "bragging/boasting" about himself and his co-workers.

^d Lit. "And his feelings for you overflow as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling."

^e Lit. "In great testing of trouble," i.e. trouble from hostile parties outside the community.

^f Paul is talking in chs. 8–9 about a collection he is helping organize to give financial support to the Jewish Christians in Judea.

^g I think Paul might be saying that they prayed to Jesus ("they gave themselves first to the Lord") as the first step in deciding how much to contribute.

^h Lit. "and the love from us among you." Many mss have, "and the love from you among us."

¹⁰So^a I'll give you my opinion about this: it's actually better for you this way,^b given that you started out last year not just doing it, but wanting to do it. ¹¹So now just finish up the project. That way, just as you've been willing and eager, you can now finish up with however much you can afford.^c ¹²Because if somebody's eager to give, their gift will be appreciated^d on the basis of what they have, not on the basis of what they don't have. ¹³After all, the point is not to create relief for others and distress for you. No, it's a matter of fairness. ¹⁴At the moment, your extra supply is going towards their shortage. Then someday their extra supply can go towards your shortage. That way it'll be equal. ¹⁵Just like the scripture says:^e

The person with a lot didn't have too much,
And the person with a little didn't go short.^f

¹⁶Well, thank God, who has put^g into Titus's heart the same active commitment towards you that we have. ¹⁷Because he didn't just accept our request: he was so strongly committed that he has started out on his own to come to you. ¹⁸And we've sent with him the brother who is well recognized^h by all the communities for his preaching of the good news. ¹⁹And not only that—he's also been elected by the communities as our traveling companion as we deliver this gift for them.ⁱ It's for the Lord's own glory and in fulfillment of our strong commitment.^j ²⁰We're making sure that no one will find fault with us about how we've handled this generous gift.^k ²¹After all, we're keeping in mind not only "what's good in the Lord's eyes," but also what's good "in people's eyes."^l

²²We've also sent our brother with them. We've tested him and found him to be committed many times, in all kinds of ways. And now he's all the more committed, because he's totally confident in you. ²³As for Titus, he's my partner and my coworker on your behalf. As for our other two brothers, they're representatives^m from the communities, and they're an honor to Christ. ²⁴So I'm

^a Lit. "And."

^b I think he's referring to the fact that an original plan has been changed. See 2 Cor. 9:2.

^c Lit. "And now also finish up the doing, so that just as the eagerness of will, so also the finishing up, out of what you have."

^d Lit. "For if the eagerness is there, it will be acceptable."

^e Lit. "Just as it is written."

^f Exod. 16:18.

^g Lit. "gave."

^h Or "who is praised."

ⁱ Lit. "he's also been elected by the communities as our traveling companion with [some mss: "in"] the administration of this gift by us."

^j Lit. "and for our eagerness."

^k Lit. "Avoiding this: that anybody [lit. "nobody"] should fault us in this generous gift being administered by us."

^l Prov. 3:4 LXX.

^m Or "emissaries," or "apostles."

sure you'll show them your love. And in front of all the communities, give them proof of the positive things we've said about you.^a

9 Of course, I hardly need^b to write you about the service project for the holy ones, because I know how committed you are.^c I bragged to the Macedonians^d about it: "Achaia^e has been ready since last year." And your enthusiasm has provoked most of them to give more. But I've sent the brothers to make sure that our bragging about you about this won't be empty. Just as I've been telling people, you'll be ready. It won't somehow turn out that people from Macedonia will come with me, and discover that you're not ready. We'd be embarrassed if that happened^f—not to mention you! So I've decided I'd better ask the brothers to go to you ahead of us. And they'll pre-arrange the generous gift^g that you originally promised. That way, what's prepared will be a generous gift,^h and not like something squeezed out of you.ⁱ

I will say this, though. "The person that plants sparingly will harvest sparingly too. And the person that plants generously will also harvest generously." Each person should give just as they've decided beforehand in their heart—not out of guilt^k or compulsion. Because "God loves a person that gives joyfully."^l And God is able to make all kinds of grace overflow for you, so that in every way, at every moment, you'll have everything you need. And you'll overflow into doing all kinds of good things. Just like scripture says,^m

They distribute good things,
They give to the poor.
The good they do lasts forever.ⁿ

10 And God, who supplies seed to the person who plants, and bread for food, is going to supply and multiply your supply of seed. And God is going to cause an abundant harvest to come from the good thing you've done.^o You'll be wealthy

^a Lit. "So proving the demonstration of your love and our boasting about you to them, in front of the communities."

^b Lit. "For though it's superfluous."

^c Lit. "I know your eagerness."

^d Prn. *mass-a-doe-nee-ans*.

^e Prn. *a-kay-a*.

^f Lit. "we'd be embarrassed, in that state of affairs."

^g "Generous gift": lit. "blessing."

^h Lit. "blessing."

ⁱ Lit. "That way, the same preparation will be as a blessing, and not as greediness." Paul didn't want them to be caught flat-footed, and then give out of a sense of obligation and embarrassment.

^j This is a proverb. For similar ideas, see Prov. 11:24-25; 22:9.

^k Lit. "grief" or "remorse."

^l Traditionally: "a cheerful giver." Prov. 22:8.

^m Lit. "Just as it is written."

ⁿ Lit. "remains forever." Ps. 112:9.

^o Lit. "And God is going to enlarge the harvest of your righteousness."

in every way, and so you'll be totally wholehearted.^a And that will result in our giving thanks to God. ¹²Because this service project^b isn't just meeting the needs of the holy ones:^c it's also overflowing into lots of thanks^d to God. ¹³Through the success^e of this service project, people are going to be glorifying God. They'll glorify God for your obedience to your public profession of the good news of Christ, and for the wholehearted way that you've shared^f with them and with everyone. ¹⁴And when they pray for you, their hearts will go out to you, thanks to the incredible^g grace that God has shown you. ¹⁵Thank God for this gift that's too wonderful for words!^h

Paul Defends His Ministry

10 I myself, Paul, am appealing to you, with Christ's gentleness and patience. I'm the one who's supposed to be unassuming when I'm with you, but bold towards you when I'm not around. ²And I'm pleading with you: I don't want to have to be bold when I come. But if I have to, I think I have the confidence to confront certain people—people who think we're living as ordinary physical people.ⁱ ³Well, we *are* ordinary physical people, but we don't fight on a physical level.^j ⁴Our weapons aren't physical^k at all—they're powerful weapons of God^l for tearing down fortresses. They tear down arguments, ⁵and every proud construction^m that's raised up in opposition to the knowledge of God. And our weapons capture every thought and make it obey Christ. ⁶They're ready to punish all disobedience, whenever you come to a place of full obedience.ⁿ

⁷Look at what's right in front of you!^o If somebody's confident that they belong to Christ, they should reconsider about themselves. Because we belong to Christ just as much as they do. ⁸After all, suppose^p we *have* bragged a bit too much about our authority—which the Lord gave us, for building you up, not tearing you down. If that's true, I'm not going to be embarrassed about it. ⁹I don't want to appear as

^a In other words, they won't be half-hearted because they're worrying about their own finances.

^b Lit. "this service ministry."

^c I.e. the Jewish Christians in Judea.

^d Some mss have, "into lots of people's thanks."

^e Lit. "proof."

^f Lit. "and for the wholeheartedness of your sharing."

^g Lit. "exceptional."

^h From 10:1 to the end of 2 Corinthians, I believe we have pages from the painful letter that Paul had recently written to them (see 2 Cor. 7:8-13).

ⁱ Verse 2 is a single, very compressed, sentence: lit. "And I plead not to be bold with that confidence with which I reckon I can venture against some who reckon us as walking according to the flesh."

^j Lit. "For we walk in flesh, but we don't wage war according to the flesh."

^k Or "fleshy."

^l Lit. "with God," suggesting "in God's army."

^m Lit. "lofty thing." I suspect he's thinking of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) as a metaphor for people's pretentious religious systems.

ⁿ Lit. "And they're holding in readiness, to deal out justice on all disobedience, whenever your obedience becomes full."

^o Or "You're looking at things according to appearances."

^p Lit. "if."

though I'm trying to shock^a you with my letters. ¹⁰Because they say, "His letters are deep and powerful, but his physical presence is weak, and his speech is despicable." ¹¹Whoever says that should consider this: whatever we're like when we communicate through letters, we're going to be the same in action, when we're there.

¹²Now, we're not trying to put ourselves in the same category with certain people who are recommending themselves to you. And we're not trying to compare ourselves to them. But when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they don't get it!^b ¹³And we're not going to brag off into infinity:^c we're going to use the yardstick of what God has allotted to us—the fact that we even reached as far as you in our ministry. ¹⁴After all, it's not as though we haven't reached you, and we're overextending ourselves.^d Because we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ. ¹⁵We're not bragging off into infinity about other people's work.^e But we have hope that, as your faith grows, we'll enlarge our territory a great deal among you—within our proper bounds. ¹⁶We hope to preach the good news in regions beyond you—not using somebody else's yardstick and bragging about work they've already done.^f ¹⁷Because^g "The person who brags should brag about the Lord."^h ¹⁸After all, it's not those who recommend themselves that are approved: it's those that the Lord recommends.ⁱ

Paul and the False Apostles

11 I wish you could put up with me in a little bit of foolishness. Really, please indulge me. ²After all, I'm jealous over you, with God's jealousy. I promised you in marriage to one husband! I'm supposed to present you to Christ as an innocent virgin.^j ³And I'm worried that somehow, just like the serpent tricked Eve by his dishonesty, your minds are going to be corrupted from your wholeheartedness and purity^k towards Christ. ⁴After all, suppose^l somebody comes and preaches another Jesus, that we haven't preached before—or you accept a different spirit, that you haven't received before—or you accept another

^a Or "scare."

^b Lit. "they don't understand"; some mss have, "without understanding."

^c Left unspoken: "...like they do."

^d Left unspoken: "...like they do."

^e Left unspoken: "...like they do."

^f Left unspoken: "...like they do."

^g Lit. "But."

^h Jer. 9:24; see 1 Cor. 1:31.

ⁱ This is put in the plural for gender-inclusivity.

^j In 1 Cor. 4:15 Paul will picture himself as being the Corinthian community's spiritual father. Under this same metaphor, he will not feel his parental role is complete until his "daughter" congregation has grown up to adulthood and has married Christ.

^k Some mss lack the words "and purity."

^l Lit. "if."

good news, that you haven't accepted before. You put up with it^a nicely! ⁵Well, I don't think I'm inferior in any way to those "super-apostles." ⁶And even if I am an amateur at public speaking, I'm certainly not an amateur when it comes to knowledge. Far from it. We've demonstrated that in every possible way. ⁷Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you could be lifted up? Was it a sin that I brought you the good news of God for free? ⁸That I robbed *other* communities to get income^b so I could serve you? ⁹And even when I ran short on money while I was with you, I wasn't a burden to anyone! Because my financial need was taken care of by the Christians^c who came from Macedonia.^d I've always kept myself from being a burden to you, and I'm going to keep it that way. ¹⁰By the truth of Christ that's in me, I'm not going to be kept from bragging about this^e in the regions of Achaia.^f ¹¹Why? Because I don't love you? God knows I do!

¹²And I'm also going to continue doing what I'm doing. That way, I'll be able to deny an opportunity to^g those who want to brag that they're actually just like us. ¹³Because these kind of people are false apostles, con artists. They're disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And it's no wonder—after all, Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it's no big thing if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of what's right.^h In the end, they'll get what their actions deserve.ⁱ

¹⁶I'll say again: nobody should take me for a fool. But if you do, then at least indulge^j me as a fool, and let me brag a little bit. ¹⁷I'm not going to talk as the Lord would in this bragging exercise,^k but as though I'm being foolish: ¹⁸since lots of people are bragging on a human level,^l I will too. ¹⁹After all, you're happy to put up with fools—you being so wise and all! ²⁰Yes, you put up with anybody that enslaves you, preys on you,^m takes advantage of you, puffs themselves up, smacks you in the face. ²¹I'm ashamed to admit that we've been too weak for such things!

Well, is anybody daring? (I'm talking like a fool now!) So am I. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. ²³Are they servants of Christ? (I'm talking like I'm out of my mind, now.) I'm a better one! I've worked harder, I've been imprisoned more, and I've been

^a Or "that person."

^b Lit. "I plundered other communities, receiving wages."

^c Lit. "brothers."

^d Prn. mass-a-**doe**-nee-a.

^e Lit. "this boast is not going to be silenced in me."

^f Prn. a-**kay**-a.

^g Lit. "cut off the opportunity from."

^h Lit. "of righteousness."

ⁱ Lit. "whose end will be in line with their works."

^j Lit. "accept."

^k Or possibly, "in this boastful self-assurance."

^l Lit. "according to the flesh."

^m Lit. "devours you."

wounded far more. I've been near death lots of times. ²⁴I got thirty-nine lashes from the Jews five times.^a ²⁵I was beaten with wooden rods three times by the Romans. I got stoned once. I was shipwrecked three times. I've spent a night and a day in the water. ²⁶I've had lots of journeys, with dangers from rivers, dangers from armed robbers, dangers from fellow Jews, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the outback, dangers in the sea, dangers from false Christians.^b ²⁷With sweat^c and hardship, in lots of sleepless nights, going hungry and thirsty—hungry *lots* of times, cold, and in rags.^d ²⁸Apart from everything else, there's my daily concern for all the communities. ²⁹Who is weak without me feeling weak? Who falls into sin without me feeling terrible?^e

³⁰If I have to brag, I'm going to brag about my weakness. ³¹God, the Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever and ever, knows I'm not lying. ³²In Damascus,^f king Aretas^g was watching the city to capture me. ³³And I was lowered out of a window through the city wall in a basket, and slipped through his fingers.^h

Paul's Visions and Revelations

12 I have to brag. It's not good for anything, but I'll go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ¹I know a person who was in Christ fourteen years ago. Whether what happened was in his body or out of his body, I don't know; God knows. That certain person was snatched away to heaven.ⁱ ²Yes,^j I know a certain person that was snatched away to Paradise—whether in his body or out of his body, I don't know; God knows. ³And he heard secret things—things no human being is allowed to talk about. ⁴I'm going to brag about that certain person. But about myself, I'll only brag about my weaknesses. ⁵That way,^k if I should decide to brag, I won't be being foolish, because I'll be telling the truth. I'm going to restrain myself, so that nobody will go beyond what they see or hear *from me*, ⁷and judge me by the exceptional nature of the revelations.^l

So, to prevent me from getting too full of myself, a “thorn in the flesh”^m was given to me. It was one of Satan's angels, who gets to slap me—so that I won't get too

^a Forty lashes was considered a lethal whipping, and the worst punishment short of that was thirty-nine lashes—a truly terrible beating.

^b Lit. “brothers.”

^c Lit. “toil,” or “gruelling work.”

^d Lit. “naked.”

^e Lit. “and I don't burn.”

^f Pm. da-**mass**-kas.

^g Pm. **arr**-a-tas.

^h Lit. “escaped from his hands.”

ⁱ Lit. “the third heaven,” the realm of God's presence.

^j Lit. “And.” But I think he's talking about the same experience.

^k Lit. “For.”

^l Lit. “so that nobody will judge me beyond what they see or hear from me, and by the outstandingness of the revelations.” Paul is implicitly faulting his opponents for taking credit for what they've seen, not what they are.

^m See Num. 33:55.

full of myself. ⁸I've asked the Lord three times about this—for it to be taken away from me. ⁹But he's said to me, "My grace is enough for you." ¹⁰Because power is brought to perfection in weakness." So I'm totally happy to brag about my weaknesses. That way, Christ's power can find a home in me. ¹¹So I'm content with weaknesses, insults, ¹²hardships, persecutions, and stressful situations. Because when I'm weak, then I'm strong.

Paul's Hurt Feelings at Having to Defend Himself to the Corinthians

¹¹I've been foolish—you've forced me into it. After all, you ought to have been the ones defending me. ¹²Because I'm not a bit inferior to those "super-apostles"—even if I *am* nothing. ¹³The miracles ¹⁴of an apostle were performed in front of you ¹⁵with complete consistency ¹⁶—miracles, ¹⁷wonders, and displays of power. ¹⁸In what way have you gotten a worse deal than the other communities—other than the fact that I wasn't a burden to you? Forgive me for that injustice!

¹⁹Look, this is the third time I'm getting ready to come to you. And I'm not going to be a burden to you—because I'm not after your money: I'm after you. After all, children don't have to save up for their parents: parents save up for their children. ²⁰And I'll gladly spend—and *be* spent—for you. ²¹If I love you too much, am I supposed to be loved less? ²²Well, fine. ²³I didn't burden you. But no—con artist that I am—I took you in by deceit. ²⁴Have I used one of the people I've sent to you to squeeze money out of you? ²⁵I asked Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Surely Titus didn't squeeze you for money! Haven't we conducted ourselves in the same spirit as he has? Haven't we followed in the same footsteps?

²⁶Maybe all this time you've been thinking that we're defending ourselves to you. ²⁷We're saying this in front of God, in Christ, dear friends: *everything* we're doing is to build you up. ²⁸Because I'm afraid that when I come, maybe I'll find that you're not the way I want you to be—and I won't turn out to be the way you want me to be either. Will there be petty fights, jealousy, rages, competitiveness, vicious talk,

^a Possibly this means, "I've given you enough grace to handle it."

^b Lit. "insolences."

^c Lit. "For I ought to be being recommended by you."

^d Lit. "signs."

^e Lit. "among you."

^f Lit. "with all endurance/patience." I don't think he's saying miracles were performed with an attitude of patience. He's saying that they were performed consistently, not sporadically.

^g Lit. "signs."

^h Lit. "for your lives/souls."

ⁱ Lit. "But so be it."

^j Lit. "Surely it wasn't one of the people I sent to you through whom I squeezed you for money?" From the way he argues here, it looks as though Paul's opponents (whom he calls the "super-apostles") have been spreading a nasty rumor that the collection for the poor Christians in Judea is somehow for his personal gain.

^k Or "All this time, have you been thinking that we're defending ourselves to you?"

^l Lit. "is for your edification."

gossiping, self-importance, infighting?^a ²¹I don't want to come to you again and have God humiliate me in front of you. Then I'd have to grieve over lots of people, who sinned before, and didn't change their hearts^b from the filthiness and sexual immorality and promiscuity^c that they were into.^d

Final Warnings and Greetings

13 This is the third time I'm coming to you. "Everything is to be established from the testimony of^e two or three witnesses."^f

¶When I was with you the second time, I warned the people who've been sinning all this time. And I'm warning them, and everybody else, while I'm away:^g if I come again, I won't spare people. ¶Since you're looking for proof that Christ is speaking in me, I'll give it to you. *He's not weak towards you—he's powerful among you.* ¶After all, though he was hung on a cross in weakness, he lives in the power of God. And though we're weak in him, yet with you we're going to live with him in God's power.

¶Test yourselves to see if you're in the faith. Evaluate yourselves. Or don't you realize that Christ is in you—that is, unless you're unworthy of him?^h ¶And I'm confident that you're going to know *we're not unworthy.*ⁱ ¶And we're praying to God^j that you won't do anything wrong. And not so that we'll look good^k—far from it. We're praying that you'll do the right thing^l and that we'll look like the unworthy ones.^m ¶After all, we don't have any power to fight against the truth—only *for it.* ¶Because we're happy whenever we're weak but you're strong. That's exactly what we're praying for: your wholeness.ⁿ ¶That's why I'm writing all this while I'm away—so that I won't have to be ruthless with the authority the Lord has given me. That authority is intended for building people up, not for tearing them down.

^a Or "rioting," or "[civil/community] disorder."

^b Traditionally: "and did not repent" (see "Bible Words").

^c Or "lack of self-control," or "licentiousness."

^d Lit. "that they were practicing."

^e Lit. "established on the mouth of."

^f Deut. 19:15.

^g Lit. "I forewarned before and forewarn—as when I was with you, also now while I'm away—those who've sinned before and all the rest."

^h Or "unless you're people who fail the test."

ⁱ Or "we're not people who fail the test."

^j Or possibly, "we're pleading with you, in front of God."

^k Lit. "appear worthy," or "appear acceptable."

^l Lit. "so you'll do the good."

^m Lit. "and as though we were unworthy."

ⁿ Or "your complete maturation."

¹¹Finally, brothers and sisters, goodbye. Be well. Encourage one another. Be in agreement and be at peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹²Greet each other with a holy kiss. All the holy ones say hello.

¹³May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the unifying presence^a of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

^a Traditionally: “the fellowship.”