










2 Corinthians

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Notes

In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: Paul for Everyone 2 Corinthians by Tom Wright, The Message of 2 Corinthians Bible Speaks Today commentary by Paul Barnett, 2 booklets used for Bible studies by St Faiths, Narrabeen: 2 Corinthians Weak yet Empowered to Serve by Ashleigh Hooker 2002 and 2 Corinthians Paul Drops A Line by Sarah Jones 2016, Bible Brief on 2 Corinthians by James Warren from The Briefing #318 March 2005, Encouragement The Key to Caring by Larry Crabb and Dan Allender and www.biblestudytools.com.

Ed O'Connor 2016

Study 1, 2 Cor 1:1-2:11, comfort

Getting started

1. What characteristics do you want in your leaders? - I mean political, military or business leaders.



2. What characteristics would we add to that list if we were to include Christian leaders?

We will come back to these questions a little later in the study

Background

In Paul's time, the bustling city of Corinth, which had been one of the largest in Ancient Greece, was now a Roman colony. The official language of this mountainous peninsula, in the region of Achaia, was Latin, though Greek was widely spoken. Situated on the narrow isthmus that connected the Peloponnese with the mainland of Greece, jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea, Corinth lay strategically at the crossroads of two important trade routes through Asia and Europe.



The city and its people prospered greatly by charging taxes levied on goods that passed through its shipping channels. Because of this, ancient Corinth was a wealthy, commercially important city, whose prosperity was reflected in the city's magnificent architecture, temples, fountains, theatres, baths and infrastructure, including paved roads. Luxury, materialism, indulgence and decadence were an unfortunate by-product of this wealth, with many native to Corinth worshipping pleasure and prosperity. Corinth was known for its arts, drama and skilled craftsmen. Many foreigners would come to Corinth, trading goods and gathering at

the marketplace (Agora). Steeped in mythology, it also became a hub for the worship of the old Greco-Roman gods, including Aphrodite and Apollo, who both had large temples in the city of Corinth, and idol worship was rampant amongst Corinth's philosophy-loving inhabitants.

Paul's relationship with the Corinthian Christians spanned a period of several years (c.AD 50 - 57). Paul visited the city on 3 separate occasions, as well as sending representatives on his behalf. Members of the church at Corinth also visited Paul while he was in Ephesus, (1 Cor 1:11, 16:17) on one occasion even bringing him a letter from their church in Corinth (1 Cor 7:1).

In Acts 18 we read of Paul's first visit to Corinth. As was his custom, he spent time in the Jewish synagogues reasoning with the Jews and sharing with them the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He spent 'some time' there, staying with fellow-tent-makers and fellow believers Aquila and Priscilla. His message was rejected, on the whole, by the Jews in Corinth, so Paul turned his attention to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, many of whom believed and were baptised. It was this group of believers that formed the foundation of the Corinthian church. Paul stayed for a year and a half.

From 2 Corinthians Paul Drops A Line by Sarah Jones pp 4-6.

Paul wrote his first letter (1 Cor 5:9-11) as a follow up to this first visit. 1 Corinthians is Paul's second letter and there is no trace of the first. Paul made a second visit to the Corinthians, the painful visit (2 Cor 2:1, 13:2) while staying in Ephesus. He wrote a third letter as a follow up to the second visit (2 Cor 2:3). 2 Corinthians is Paul's fourth letter to them and he promises to visit one more time (2 Cor 12:20-13:1) which is probably referred to in Acts 20:2-3.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to answer a number of problems and issues that the church was struggling with i.e. divisions within their group, wisdom and foolishness, sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, marriage and singleness, food sacrificed to idols, Paul's apostleship, idolatry, headship, eating meals together, spiritual gifts, the resurrection and collecting money.

Bible

3. Read 2 Cor 1:1-7.
 - (a) Who needs to be comforted and why do they need comforting?
 - (b) Read 2 Cor 1:6 again.
 - (i) How does the distress of Paul and Timothy relate to the comfort and salvation of the Corinthian church?
 - (i) How does the comforting of Paul and Timothy relate to the comfort of the Corinthian church?
 - (iii) What are the positives that come out of this situation?
4. Read 2 Cor 1:8-11.
 - (a) What does this passage tell us about the episode in Asia?
 - (b) How did Paul and Timothy deal with it?
 - (c) What characteristics of leaders are revealed here?

5. Read 2 Cor 1:12-2:4.
(a) Paul was planning to visit the Corinthian church (v 16) but changed his mind. Why (1:23-2:1)?

(b) How does Paul defend his integrity?

6. Read 2 Cor 2:5-11.
What hints does this passage give us about church discipline?

Traditionally this 'sinful man' has been identified with the incestuous man of 1 Cor 5:1-5, but a good alternative is that this man was the 'ring leader' (cf. 2 Cor 7:12) who had thwarted Paul's authority on his second 'painful visit'.

From Bible Brief on 2 Corinthians, Reading 3, by James Warren from The Briefing #318 March 2005.

To finish

7. Could "weakness" in leadership work in business, politics or the military? Why/why not?

Study 2, 2 Cor 2:12-3:18, fragrance

Getting started

1. (a) What places have particular smells e.g. Aunty Jean's house always smelt like tomato sauce (I don't know why)?



- (b) Does a church building have a particular smell (Roman Catholic churches might smell like incense)?

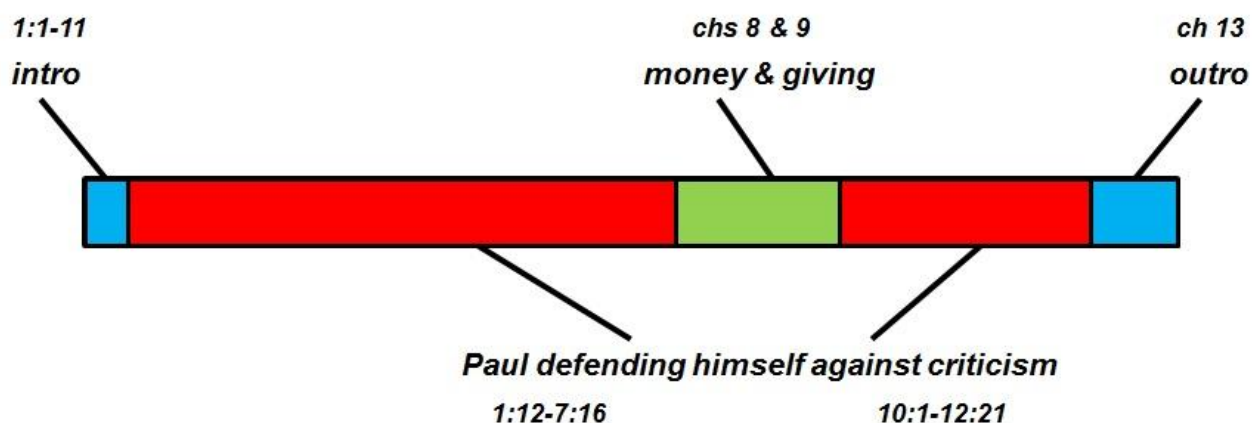
- (c) Does where you work have a particular smell?



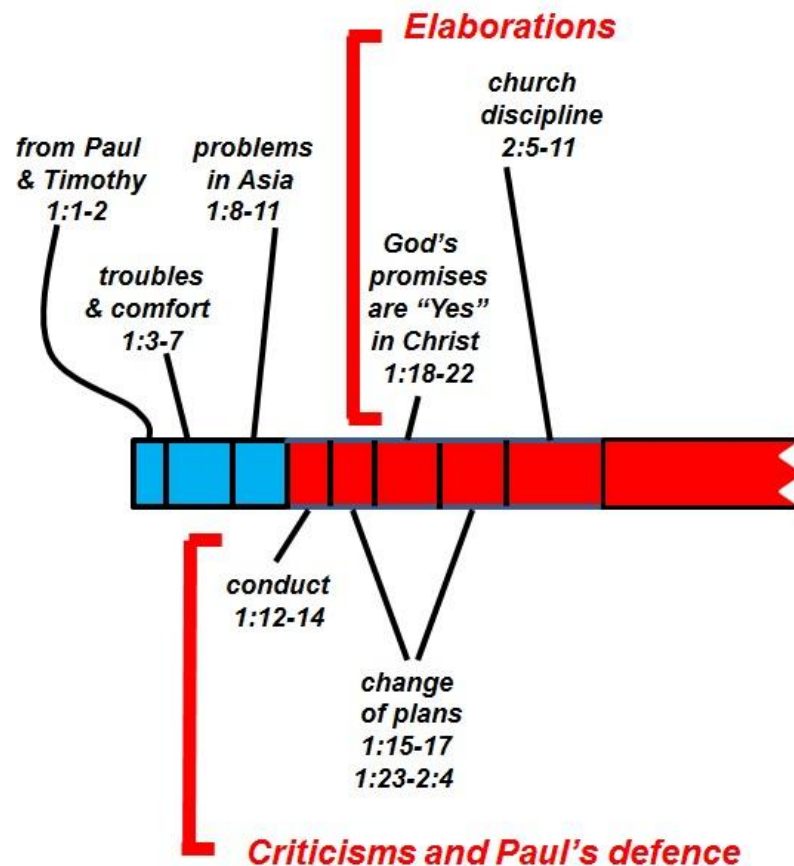
The story so far . . .

After the first chapter and a half of 2 Corinthians we saw that Paul was defending himself against various criticisms. Paul and Timothy's conduct came under question (1:12-14) as did their decision to change their plans (1:15-17, 1:23-2:4). Paul answers these objections and elaborates by writing about Christ keeping God's promises (1:18-22) and Paul giving advice about how to treat the person who has grieved them (2:5-11). The whole letter is about Paul answering his critics and elaborating on particular points as they arise but he takes a break from defending himself to write about the money the Corinthians are donating to other churches (see below).

2 Corinthians



We can summarise our progress through the letter so far by the following picture:



Bible

2. Read 2 Cor 2:12-16.
 - (a) Paul says God uses us "...to spread everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (v 14). What does this mean?



Play 2Cor5_11to6_2S2policeTicoRice.mp3

Most people in Paul's world would know about **triumphal processions**. When a king, a general, or some other great leader had won a notable military victory, the whole city would turn out to welcome him and his troops as they came home in jubilation. They would bring with them the prisoners they had taken; they would display the booty they had plundered; and they would do everything to make it clear to their own people that they had indeed been victorious. All kinds of ceremonies and rituals were devised to make the point, and among them was the practice of the **burning of incense**. This celebrated the arrival of the triumphant general; it spoke to people in the crowds, and in neighbouring streets, of what was happening, whether they could see it or not. It reminded the victors of their victory, and the rewards that awaited them; and it reminded the conquered prisoners of their defeat, and the fate that lay in store for them. Prisoners were usually killed, perhaps by being forced to fight wild animals in the amphitheatre. Alternatively, they might be sold into slavery.

From Paul for Everyone 2 Corinthians by Tom Wright p 24.

- (b) Do you feel that you are spreading the *aroma of Christ* amongst your non-Christian friends and family? What makes this hard?

(c) Jesus divides people into two groups (v15-16). To one group he is the fragrance of life and to the other he is the smell of death.

(i) What part do we play in bringing people to Christ?

(ii) What part does God play?

3. Read 2 Cor 2:12-13 again.

(a) Looking back on your life do you think there were particular times when the Lord opened a door for you?



(i) What did you do?

(ii) What did Paul do in vv 12-13?

4. Read 2 Cor 2:17-3:6.

(a) What does Paul mean by saying people are a letter (3:2)?

(b) What does it mean when it says “the letter kills but the Spirit gives life” (3:6)?

5. Read 2 Cor 3:7-18.

What is *glory*? Man cannot see God [John 1:18]; what God shows man and permits him to see is his ‘glory’ or ‘brightness’. God displays his ‘glory’ for all to see in the sun by day and the moon and stars by night [Ps 19:1]. He revealed his glory to his servant Moses [Ex 33:18-34:8] and in his Son’s miracles [John 2:11] and through his death [John 12:23-24]. Three disciples, together with Moses and Elijah who reappeared for the occasion, witnessed the glorified Jesus on the mount of transfiguration [Mark 9:2-8]. Paul saw the glory of God in the face of Christ on the road approaching Damascus [Acts 9:3-5].

Although ‘glory’ belongs to God alone, he imparts his glory to his people. Through the gospel God shines his light into the darkness of our hearts (2 Cor 4:6). Thereafter the Spirit progressively intensifies the glory within the believer’s life (2 Cor 3:18).

From The Message of 2 Corinthians Bible Speaks Today commentary by Paul Barnett p 93.

(a) Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 (also quoted in Heb 8:8-13). It was always God’s intention to bring in a new covenant, through his Son. How does the new covenant differ from the old covenant?

(b) Jesus says in Matthew 5:17: *"do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them"*.

Read 2 Cor 3:12-16 and Hebrews 8:13.

(i) In light of these passages and the above quote from Jesus; discuss in what ways, if any, as Christians, are we still bound by Old Testament Law?

(ii) What place does the Old Testament Law have in the life of a Christian?

(c) Just as Moses reflected the Lord's glory (Exodus 34:29-35) Paul tells us that we too are reflecting the Lord's glory (2 Cor 3:18).

(i) How do you reflect God's glory?

(ii) How do you see God's glory reflected in the lives of others?

(d) From 1 Corinthians the Corinthian church knew a lot about the Spirit (see 1 Cor chs 2, 12 and 14) and a lot about freedom (see 1 Cor ch 10). What sort of freedom is Paul talking about here (2 Cor 3:17)?

To finish.

6. What freedom do we experience?



Study 3, 2 Cor 4:1-5:10, pots of clay

Getting started

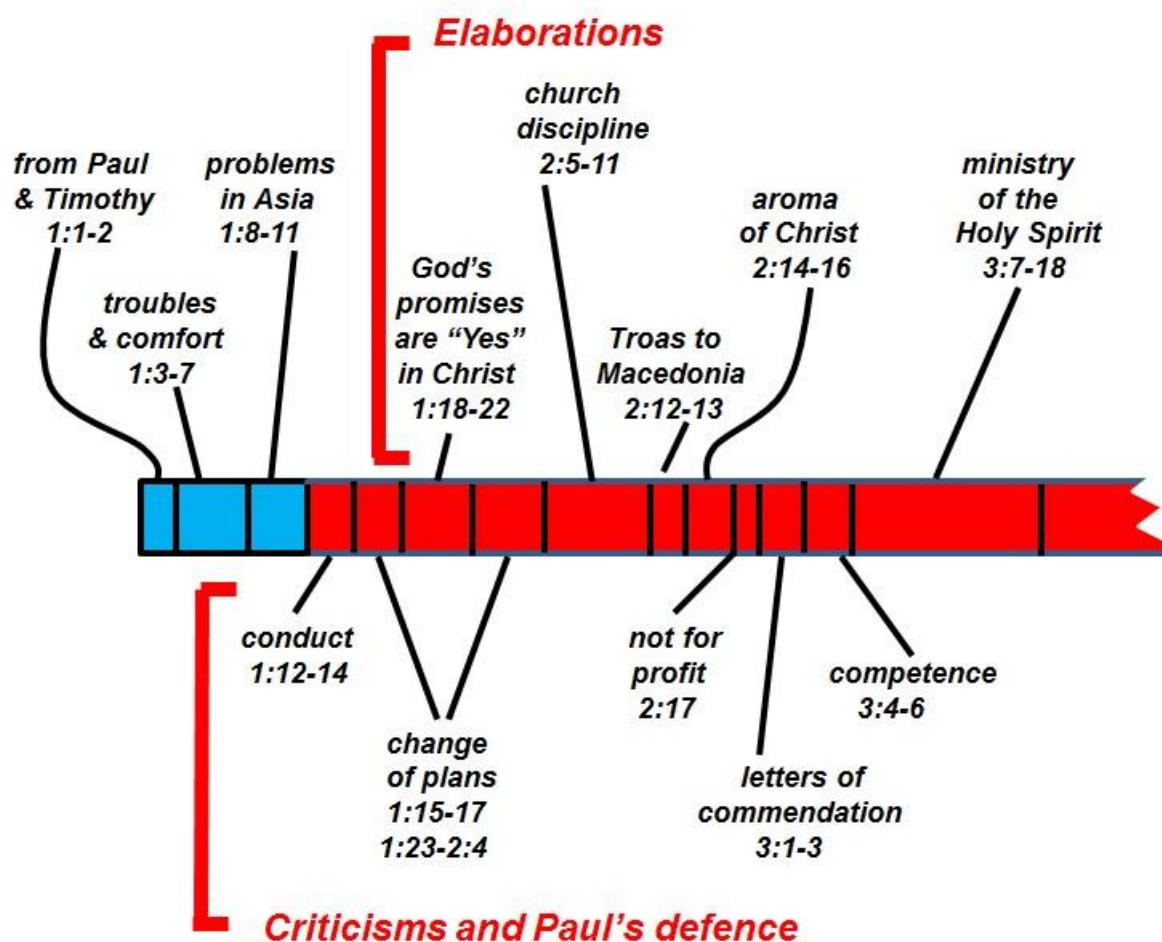
1. (a) What does it mean to be “whole hearted” about something?



(b) Was there a particular project or job that you were involved in where you were whole hearted in your efforts to achieve the goal?

(c) What causes you to sometimes lose heart in achieving your goal?

The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read 2 Cor 4:1-6.
 (a) What ministry is Paul talking about (v 1)?

(b) (i) How does Paul present the gospel?

(ii) What is the result?

The elements in Paul's **gospel** which would have caused acute difficulties for Jews, including many Jewish Christians, were those which emphasised that the covenant of God with Israel was now fulfilled or ended (3:13). In particular, his proclamation of Jesus Christ as the 'Son of God', the 'Yes' to all the 'promises of God' (1:19), must have created grave problems for the members of that race. Similarly his insistence that the new covenant had superseded a deglorified covenant which issued only in 'condemnation' and 'death' (3:7-9) could not fail to have provoked a strong reaction in those loyal to Moses and the law.

From The Message of 2 Corinthians Bible Speaks Today commentary by Paul Barnett p 80.

3. Read 2 Cor 4:7-18.

Note on 2 Cor 4:10: the *death of Jesus* in Paul's *body* is his way of speaking of the physical and emotional pain associated with his ministry of the new covenant.

From The Message of 2 Corinthians Bible Speaks Today commentary by Paul Barnett p 89.

(a) Who or what is the treasure?



(b) Who or what are the jars of clay?



The Corinthians have been looking at the envelope – at Paul's own public figure, his speaking style, and at the fact that he is in and out of trouble, weakness, and now near to death – and they have concluded that there is nothing at all remarkable about him. He ought to look more important than that, surely, if he really is a messenger with a message from the living God!

No, says Paul: you've missed the point. Precisely because of the vital importance of the message, the messenger must be dispensable. It's like putting **treasure into clay pots of earthenware jars**; they are fragile, breakable, disposable, but the treasure is what matters. If it were otherwise, the jars might regard themselves as important.

From Paul for Everyone 2 Corinthians by Tom Wright p 44.

(c) For what reason(s) would people possibly lose heart (vv 1, 16)?

(d) Why do Paul and Timothy not lose heart?

(e) What does it mean to be “inwardly renewed, day by day” (v 16)?

4. Read 2 Cor 5:1-10.
What ideas in this passage encourage us to “not lose heart”?

In this passage – and it is typical of many in the New Testament – ‘**heaven**’ is not *the place we go to when we die*, but rather *the place where God has our future bodies already in store for us*. . . .

The idea of ‘going to heaven’ as a final destination can trick people into imagining that the Christian teaching about what happens after death is that you leave the body behind and go off into a non-bodily state where the ‘soul’ is either saved or lost. That is clearly wrong. Paul argues that we shall be given new bodies, not immediately after we die (unless the Lord returns then), but on the great day of resurrection which lies in the future. . . .

At the moment heaven and earth, the two interlocking spheres of God’s good creation, have not come together as, in God’s eventual purpose, they will (Revelation 21), when, in answer to countless prayings of the Lord’s own prayer, God’s kingdom comes ‘on earth as in heaven’. The central figure of that new world will be, of course, the personal and royal presence of Jesus himself at the centre of the new creation. But in the meantime, when they die, members of the royal family (those who have been ‘anointed’ by the spirit, as Jesus was: see 2 Cor 1:21) go from the body to be ‘with the Lord’. There they will wait until the time when everything is made new.

From Paul for Everyone 2 Corinthians by Tom Wright pp 52-57.

To finish

5. (a) What are some things we know exist but we can’t see them?

(b) How do we know those things exist?

(c) How do we live by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7)?

Study 4, 2 Cor 5:11-6:13, motivation

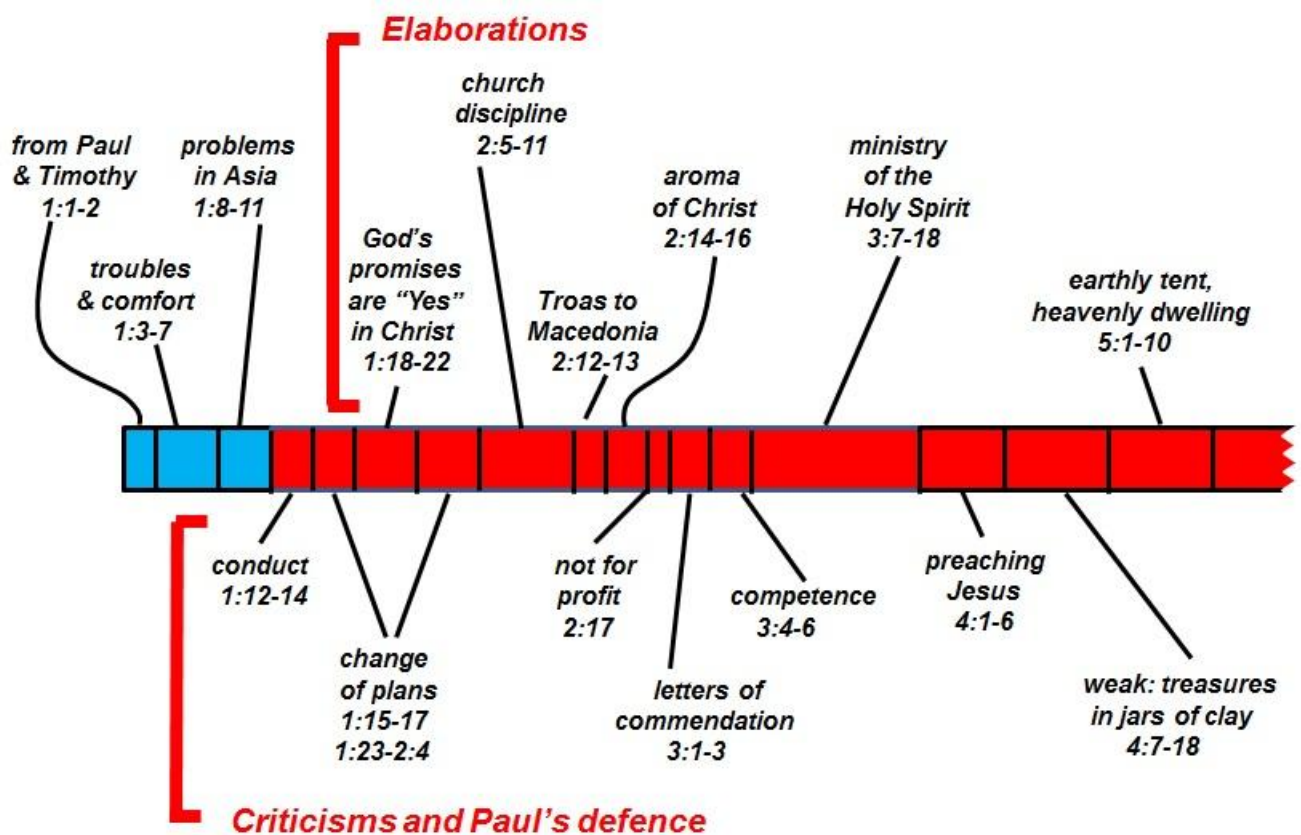
Getting started

1. What are you motivated by e.g. love, fear, guilt, embarrassment, gratitude, duty, money, passion, pride, status, revenge, beauty, pleasure, intellectual interest?



2. What is your strongest motivation
 - at home?
 - at work?
 - at church?

The story so far . . .



Bible

3. Read 2 Cor 5:11-15.
 - (a) What is the connection between fearing the Lord (v 11) and the previous passages?
 - (b) How is this a motivation for persuading people?
 - (c) What other motivations are there in v 14?

(d) What possible objections to Paul and Timothy are suggested in this passage?

4. Read 2 Cor 5:16-21.

(a) How would you regard someone from a worldly point of view (v 16)?

(b) Why do Paul and Timothy now no longer regard people from a worldly point of view (vv 16-17)?

(c) What is the ministry of reconciliation?

The great symphony of **reconciliation** composed on Calvary needed to be copied out into orchestral parts for all the world to play. And that's where Paul and the other apostles come in. 'God was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah, *and entrusting us with the message of reconciliation*'. He says it twice, in very similar words, to rub the message home. Something new *has* happened; something new *must now* happen. The world had never before seen a ministry of reconciliation; it has never before heard a message of reconciliation. No wonder the Corinthians found Paul's work hard to fathom. It didn't fit any preconceived ideas they may have had. He was behaving like someone . . . who lived in a whole new world.

From Paul for Everyone 2 Corinthians by Tom Wright p 65.

(d) What does Paul mean by the term "Christ's ambassadors"?

An **ambassador** is chosen to act as a representative for his or her home country/organisation. They are responsible for understanding the culture in which they live as an ambassador but they must also work to keep the best interests of their home country/organisation in mind, expressing the views and standpoints of their home country/organisation in a cultural setting other than their own. Ambassadors are true liaisons.

From 2 Corinthians Paul Drops A Line by Sarah Jones p 19 quoting from careers.stateuniversity.com.

An ambassador is an official representative of a king or government, as of Pharaoh (Isaiah 30:4); of the princes of Babylon (2 Chronicles 32:31); of Neco, king of Egypt (2 Chronicles 35:21); of the messengers of peace sent by Hezekiah, king of Judah, to Sennacherib, king of Assyria (Isaiah 33:7). The same Hebrew term is used of the messengers sent by Jacob to Esau (Genesis 32:3); by Moses to the king of Edom (Numbers 20:14). . . . In the New Testament the term is used in a figurative sense. As the imprisoned representative of Christ at Rome Paul calls himself "an ambassador in chains" (Ephesians 6:20); and in 2 Corinthians 5:20 includes, with himself, all ministers of the gospel, as "ambassadors on behalf of Christ."

From www.biblestudytools.com

Play 2Cor5_11to6_2SurveyAmbassadorsHughPalmer2016.mp3

(e) How are we the righteousness of God (v 21)?

[Paul] has been called not just to speak about the fact that God has been faithful to the covenant; he is called to *embody* that faithfulness, to have it worked out, as he had been arguing in chapters 4 and 5, in his own 'death' and new life, in his own getting ready to stand before the Messiah's judgment seat, and above all in his own answering love and devotion to the Messiah who had loved him so much. The cross itself, in all its inexhaustible meaning, stands behind the ministry, which Paul exercises, which he wants the Corinthians to understand.

But how is this possible? As he asked in 2 Cor 2:16, who is capable of being God's agent in this extraordinary work? The answer is in the cross, on which God made the sinless Messiah to 'be sin' on our behalf. All our sins, our failings, our inadequacies, were somehow dealt with there, so that we – the apostles, and all who are called to be 'ministers of reconciliation' – could embody in our own lives the faithfulness of God. From Paul for Everyone 2 Corinthians by Tom Wright p 66.

5. Read 2 Cor 6:1-2.

2 Cor 6:2 quotes Isaiah 49:8. The context for Isaiah 49:8: In the first 39 chapters Isaiah deals mostly with God's judgement and the Assyrian threat. Then Babylon becomes the next aggressor and God's people are taken into exile. In the following chapters Isaiah's vision leaves current affairs behind and looks further into the future. A new phase in God's dealing with his people begins to unfold in chapter 40 – a time of comfort and forgiveness. Chapters 41 and 42 - God is ruler of the nations. He will bring justice to the nations through his Servant. Chapters 43 to 48 – Isaiah explains how God fulfils his promises through his Servant.

(a) What is God's grace?



(b) How does God's grace relate to the previous passage on reconciliation?

(c) How does God's grace relate to the Isaiah verse on God's favour and salvation?

6. Read 2 Cor 6:3-13.
What motivations for Paul's and Timothy's ministry are apparent in this passage?

To finish

7. What does it mean to you to be a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)?



A different way of describing what it means to be a new creation is found in Tim Winton's film, The Turning. Rae (pictured and played by Rose Byrne) is in an abusive relationship. She makes friends with Sherry (played by Miranda Otto) and learns that she and her husband are Christians. In this scene they are having a chat in Sherry's car as Sherry gives Rae a lift home.

Play ConversionTheTurning.mp3 (1 min 30 secs)

Notice the author, Tim Winton, doesn't use Christian clichés in this exchange between the two ladies. When Rae asks "What's it like, this born again business?" Sherry begins to answer by explaining what it is about. Rae interrupts her and says she doesn't want to know what it is about but she wants to know what it feels like. Sherry's answer is interesting because it is not how we are taught to express Christian conversion but it does give an insight into what it means to be a new creation.

"It was like a hot knife going into me like I was butter and this knife was opening me up and suddenly I could see all this possibility in the world and, something more than that, there was hope and beauty where all I felt before was hollow."

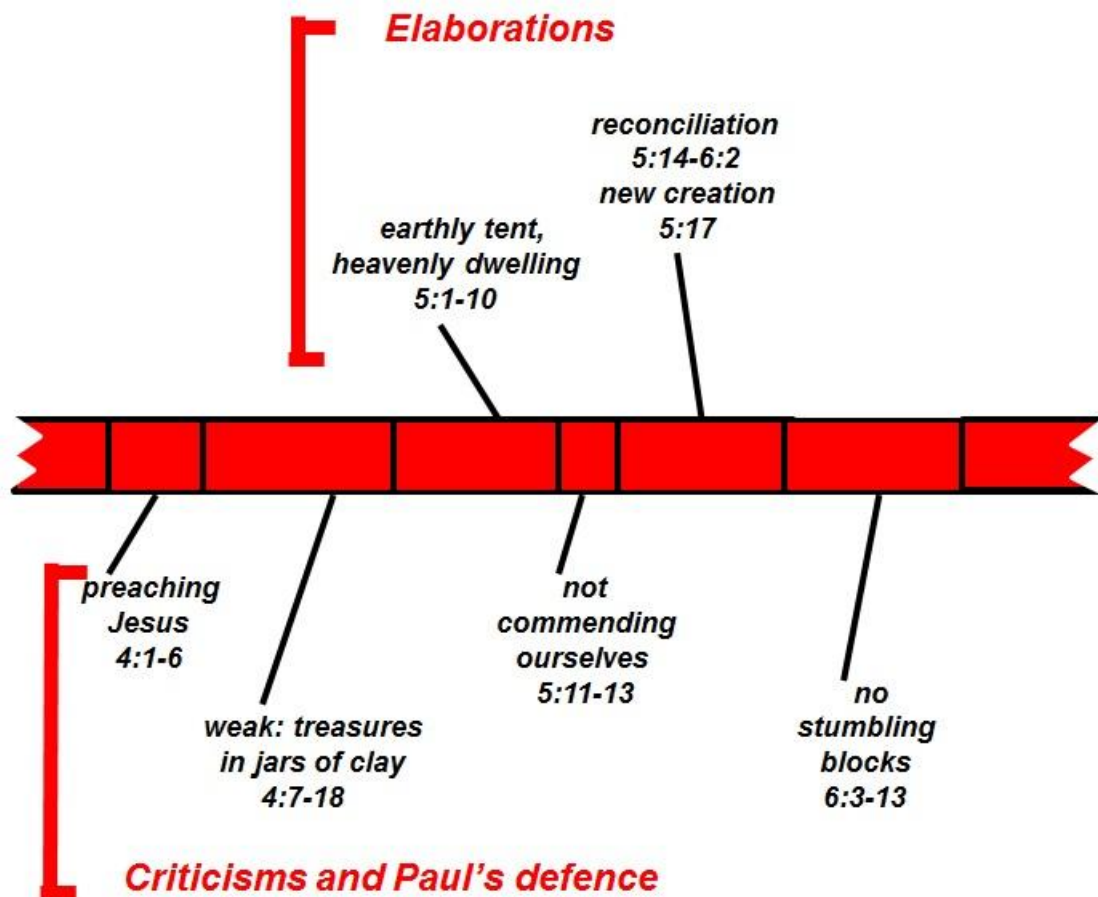
Study 5, 2 Cor 6:14-7:16, yoked together

Getting started

1. You (person F) are randomly placed in a group with 5 other people to research, produce and print a report. After some group discussion the bossy one, person A, tells the other 5 what they have to do. Person B and C are slackers and won't do much. Person D says he will do all the research and give it to other people to write up. Then the smartest person in the room, person E, says we are all hopeless so she will do the whole thing and get top marks if the rest of us do nothing but show up for meetings. One by one each of the group agrees to this until it comes to you. What do you do?



The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read 2 Cor 6:14-7:1.
(a) This passage is sometimes cited as a "proof text" for commanding a Christian to not marry a non-Christian. What is this passage really about?



Before their conversion to Christianity, many of the Corinthian believers would have partaken in **pagan temple worship**. Apart from the large temples of Apollo and Aphrodite, there were six other temples in Corinth, dedicated to Greek gods and goddesses. There was a temptation for these new converts to revert back to pagan temple worship or to partake in meals and banquets, with their unbelieving friends, dedicated to one of the pagan gods.

Paul is urging the Christians to make a clean break from this, to remain set apart and distinctive from their non-Christian contemporaries. It is in this context that he writes: *do not be yoked together with unbelievers* (6:14). This verse is based on Deuteronomy 22:10 which forbids the yoking together of an ox and donkey for ploughing. Effective ploughing cannot be done using unevenly yoked animals.

From 2 Corinthians Paul Drops A Line by Sarah Jones p 21.

(b) From this passage or otherwise, should Christians be “yoked together” with non-Christians in . . .

- politics?
- business?
- sport?
- marriage?

Why/why not?

3. Read 2 Cor 7:2-4.
(a) How would you feel if the minister said this about your church?

(b) Is he likely to say this? Why/why not?

4. Read 2 Cor 7:5-9.
How does this passage explain the reasons for the “comfort passage” at the beginning of the letter (2 Cor 1:3-7)?

5. Read 2 Cor 7:8-12.
What good did Paul's painful letter (v 8) do?

In essence, **repentance** is a change of mind towards God with an accompanying change of behaviour. It is the point at which I admit that I have rebelled against God's rightful rule over my life and I declare my intention to obey God in the future to the best of my ability.

A genuine repentance would require that where my rebellion against God involved other people as well then I would need to make restitution whenever that was possible. . . .

Repentance is not basically feeling sorry. . . . Some of our sins make us feel bad. Others leave us fairly unaffected. Some make us feel guilty, others hardly cause a ripple across our pond. You may feel really sorry about something you have done, but have no real desire to start living a new life under Christ's authority. You may feel a strong sense of relief when something which has really been bothering you moves on. That is not repentance. It is possible to experience real sorrow and not be repentant. On the other hand you can be truly repentant and not feel sorry. . . .

1. *You can be sorrowful and not be repentant.* In repentance the question is not “Are you sorry?”, but “Why are you sorry?” Is it because you feel bad or because you have sinned against God and have turned your back on Him. . . .

2. *You can be repentant and not sorrowful.* Jesus tells the story about a farmer and his two sons – “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

‘I will not,’ he answered, but later changed his mind [repented] and went.

Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing.

He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

Which of the two did what his father wanted?” (Matthew 21:28-32).

You can imagine the situation. The father comes to the first son, “Go work in the vineyard,” he says.

Whether in his mind or out aloud you can hear the son say, “I’m sick of this place, I’m sick of the farm and I’m sick of work! I’m not going.” He doesn’t like it. But finally he repents and the reason we know that he did repent was that he went to work. I dare say he didn’t like the farm or the farm work anymore when he went, than when he said that he wouldn’t go . But he did change his mind and exercised his will and obeyed. The second boy was full of good feelings toward his father but he was no real son, he said one thing and meant another. He changed his mind and exercised his will and disobeyed.

From A Fresh Start by John Chapman pages 152-156.

6. Read 2 Cor 7:13-16.
How are these people encouraged?

To finish

It was customary in our congregation to **encourage** young men to enter into the privilege of worship by standing and praying aloud. That particular Sunday I sensed the pressure of the saints (not, I fear, the leading of the Spirit), and I responded by unsteadily leaving my chair, for the first time, with the intention of praying.

Filled less with worship than with nervousness, I found my theology becoming confused to the point of heresy. I remember thanking the Father for hanging on the cross and praising Christ for triumphantly bringing the Spirit from the grave. Stuttering throughout, I finally thought of the word *Amen* (perhaps the first evidence of the Spirit’s leading), said it, and sat down. I recall staring at the floor, too embarrassed to look around, and solemnly vowing *never again* to pray or speak aloud in front of a group.

When the service was over, I darted toward the door, not wishing to encounter an elder who might feel obliged to correct my twisted theology. But I was not quick enough. An older Christian man named Jim Dunbar intercepted me, put his arm on my shoulder, and cleared his throat to speak.

I remember thinking to myself, “Here it comes. Oh well, just endure it and then get to the car.” I then listened to this godly gentleman speak words that I can repeat verbatim today, more than twenty years later.

“Larry,” he said, “there’s one thing I want you to know. Whatever you do for the Lord, I’m behind you one thousand per cent.” Then he walked away.

Even as I write these words, my eyes fill with tears. I have yet to tell that story to an audience without at least mildly choking. Those words were life words. They had power. They reached deep into my being. My resolve never again to speak publicly weakened instantly.

From Encouragement The Key to Caring p24 by Larry Crabb and Dan Allender.

7. Work out how you could encourage one particular person.

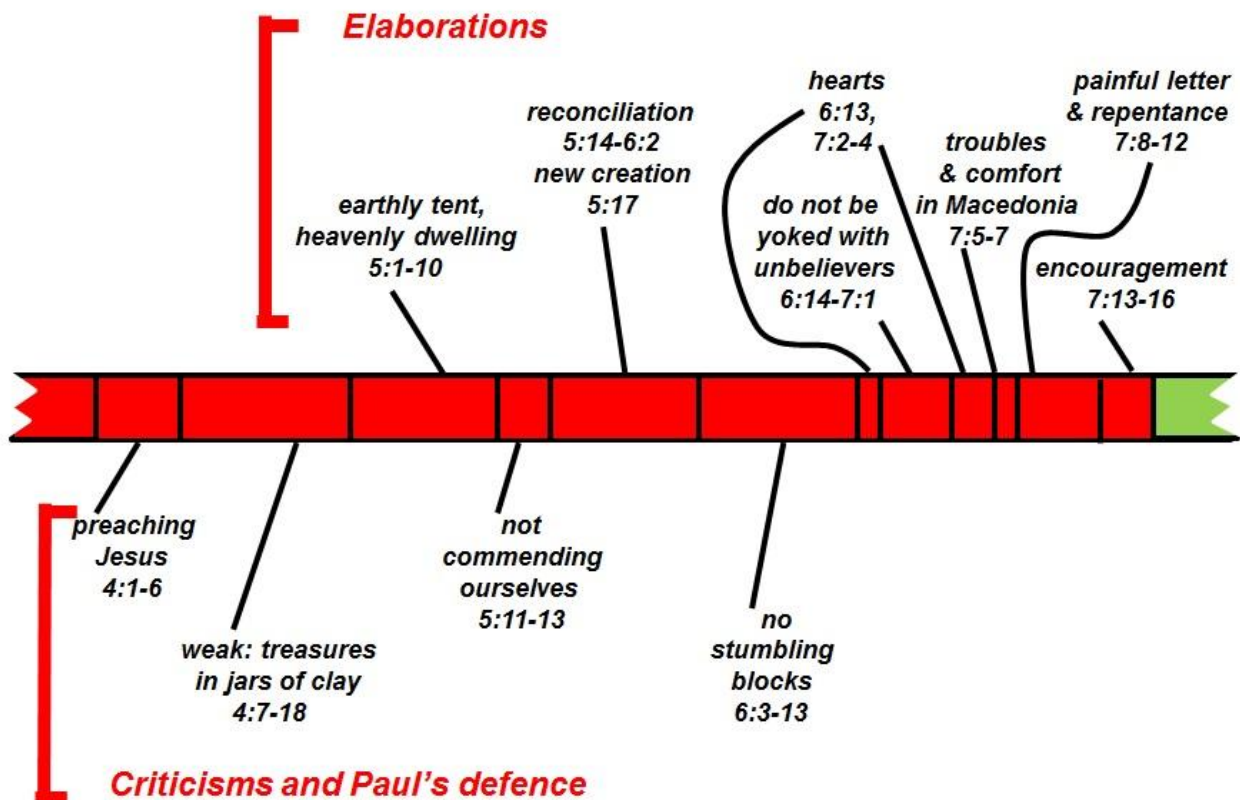
Study 6, 2 Cor chs 8 & 9, money

Getting started

1. What are some ways you could persuade people to do what you want them to do?



The story so far . . .



Bible

A decade before Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church, when he and Barnabas were on the brink of beginning their missionary travels . . . they had formed an agreement with their fellow disciples Peter, James and John in Jerusalem. It was decided that Paul and Barnabas would journey further afield to the Gentile cities to preach the gospel, while Peter, James and John would remain in Jerusalem to continue bringing the good news about Jesus to the Jews (Acts 1:8-9). This missionary agreement, or pact, between the disciples had one condition attached; that whenever Gentile churches were established, they should "remember the poor" in Jerusalem and give financially to the Christians back there (Gal 2:7-10).

From 2 Corinthians Paul Drops A Line by Sarah Jones p 24.

2. Read 2 Cor 8:1-9:15.
 - (a) Can you imagine pleading with someone for the privilege of giving your money away (2 Cor 8:4)? Why/why not?



(b) How does Paul advise the Corinthian church about giving (2 Cor 8:8-15, 8:24-9:15)?

So he [Paul] knows that at every stage the project is a tricky one: persuading the Gentile churches to hand over **money**, especially the Corinthian church that had seemed to rebel against him; taking the money safely, and with proper accounting, to Jerusalem; and delivering it acceptably to the church there.

This sense that he is treading very dangerously can be seen in the remarkable fact that in the whole of these two chapters he never once uses any of the Greek words for 'money' itself. He phrases everything very indirectly. But this isn't just because he's embarrassed about it, though it's possible that he may have been. The question of his financial relationship with Corinth, where he had consistently refused payment for his work as an apostle, had always been something of a sore point (1 Cor 9:1-18, 2 Cor 11:7-11). They were puzzled, perhaps even offended, that he hadn't accepted money for himself; what will they now think when he asks for money at last, but supposedly for someone else? All kinds of difficulties and wrong impressions suggest themselves. So Paul phrases his entire appeal, not in terms of money as such, but in terms of *grace*. . . .

[Paul uses "grace"] to refer to what God wants to do not just *in* and *for* Christians but *through* them. What does it mean that God gave 'this grace' to the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, and perhaps some others)? It didn't simply mean they had what we call a wonderful spiritual experience. It meant that, under an impulse which came from God himself, they gave money with almost reckless generosity. . . .

Paul knows, and those who have the God-given task of raising funds for the work of the gospel should never forget it, that what counts is not whipping up human sympathy for a project, nor making people feel guilty that they have money which others need, nor yet encouraging them to gain social prestige by letting it be known that they have given generously. What counts is a work of grace in the hearts and lives of ordinary people. Paul has seen this spectacularly in Macedonia; now he declares that he wants to see it in Corinth as well. Wouldn't he like to see it in the twenty-first-century church, too?

From Paul for Everyone 2 Corinthians by Tom Wright pp 85-87.

(c) What wisdom does Paul employ in carrying the gift (see 2 Cor 8:18-22)?

(d) "*Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously*" (2 Cor 9:7). Some claim that giving generously to Christian ministry will necessarily result in financial reward for the giver. Do you agree? What will the generous giver reap (see 2 Cor 9:6-15)?

To finish

3. How do you decide who to give to and how much to give?

4. How do you feel when the plate comes around at church?



5. How do you become a "cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7)?

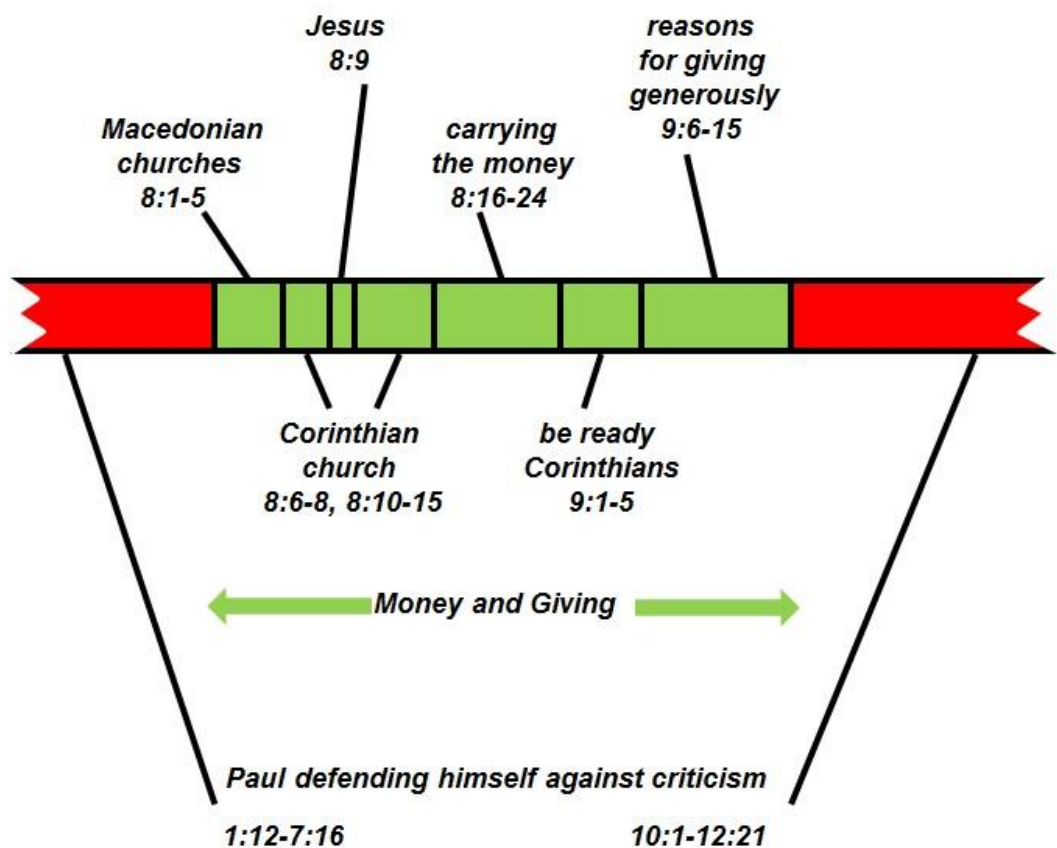
Study 7, 2 Cor 10:1-11:15, criticism

Getting started

- How do you usually handle criticism e.g. ignore it, deny it, welcome it, take it to heart, blame someone else, argue about it, sulk, get angry or get depressed?



The story so far . . .



Bible

In these chapters, Paul is answering the many criticisms of his opponents, some so-called "super apostles", who are questioning even the very nature of Paul's credibility as an apostle. They have come from Judea and their ministry is centred on power and prestige; marked by eloquent speech, visions, revelations and mighty works, as signs of true apostleship. They have infiltrated the Corinthian church and won people over to their side. Paul is now forced to vigorously defend his credentials, re-establish his authority and expose their false teaching.

From 2 Corinthians Paul Drops A Line by Sarah Jones p 27.

- Read 2 Cor 10:1-11.
 - What criticisms have been levelled at Paul?
 - How does he answer those criticisms?

(c) What type of weapons does Paul use to wage war for God, and how effective are they?

(d) What does “take captive every thought” mean in the context of this passage?

The Greek world admired physical beauty and leisure, while despising imperfection and manual labour. In terms of Greek values, Paul the tentmaker, of amateurish speech and doubtful appearance, had little to commend him. . . . To Greek eyes Paul was very inferior.

From The Message of 2 Corinthians Bible Speaks Today commentary by Paul Barnett p 161.

3. Read 2 Cor 10:12-18.

(a) When is boasting good?

(b) When is boasting bad?

(c) How does faith grow (v 15)?

4. Read 2 Cor 11:1-15.

(a) Why would some in the Corinthian church think that Paul was foolish (v 1)?

(b) What is Paul afraid of (v 3)?

(c) How does Paul cut the ground from under the false teachers (v 12)?

Paul had so blatantly disregarded social convention. At that time it was customary for the wealthy to put other people under obligation by gifts and favours. The **practice of patronage** was deeply embedded in Graeco-Roman society. The expectation was that the affluent gave money to travelling philosophers and that this was received without question and with due deference and gratitude to one's patron. In declining the Corinthians' gifts Paul was, from their viewpoint, in serious breach of social convention.

Paul's 'sin' was that while he had specifically sought to include the wealthy in his ministry [Acts 17:4, 12, Rom 16:1, 23, 1 Cor 1:26, 11:22] he had not only declined their money, but worse, he had actually done manual work to support himself. By 'lowering himself' (verse 7) in physical labour, which the Greeks traditionally despised, Paul evangelised them, thus 'elevating' them or lifting them out of the morass of their former evil lifestyle.

From The Message of 2 Corinthians Bible Speaks Today commentary by Paul Barnett p 167.

To finish

5. How do you know what is false teaching and what is true teaching?

Study 8, 2 Cor 11:16-12:21, weakness & emotion

Getting started

1. Sometimes one of the questions at a job interview is “What are your weaknesses?”
(a) How would you answer that question?



- (b) Why could it be a mistake to answer this question honestly?

The story so far . . .

Paul has defended himself against criticisms of ill conduct, not being reliable, not allowing payment for his services, not having letters of commendation, incompetence, inferior preaching, weakness, not boasting and his timidity in person but boldness by letter. He has appealed to the Corinthians to be generous in their giving to other churches. He has given wise counsel on church discipline, the ministry of the Spirit, associations with other gods, repentance, encouragement, warnings about the “super apostles” and, through all this Paul stresses the importance and relevance of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Bible

2. Read 2 Cor 11:16-12:21.
(a) Why is Paul boasting?

Though **boasting** about yourself is most un-Australian and the slightest whiff we get of someone big-noting themselves causes us to cringe or accuse the boastful one as big-headed, it was not uncommon in the ancient world. In the culture of Paul's day, it was customary to boast of your achievements, whether they be military, political or otherwise - done without even a hint of embarrassment. People would try to outdo one another and great long lists of achievements were depicted in household murals or written about in epic detail. It is with this in mind that we need to come to Paul's discussion of boasting. If he is to be judged by the criteria of his opponents, he is left with no alternative but to boast a little himself (2 Cor 11:18) Since those in the Corinthian church are being swayed by the boasting of others, Paul presents his own 'achievements' to his readers, though we will see that his boasting is markedly different.

From 2 Corinthians Paul Drops A Line by Sarah Jones p 30.

- (b) What points are made using sarcasm (2 Cor 11:19-21)?

[Paul] is listing his achievements; he is boasting; he is celebrating all his triumphs; and this one [2 Cor 11:32-33] is the last and greatest of them all. Only (and this is the point of the whole passage) *he is boasting of all the wrong things*. And his escape from Damascus was the climax of the list.

From Paul for Everyone 2 Corinthians by Tom Wright pp 126-127.

- (c) Why does Paul “delight in weaknesses” (2 Cor 12:10)?

(d) Why are weaknesses good for us?

(e) Should we admit to our weaknesses? Why/why not?

Paul is speaking of the extraordinary and lavish spiritual experiences he has had, but in the same breath he speaks of his 'thorn in the flesh'. He couldn't simply enjoy living on a higher plane than everyone else; that might easily have made him too exalted. He might have become proud. He might have thought he could boast . . .

. . . Which is of course the point. This is the climax of his own 'boasting' list, which he has carefully constructed in such a way as to pull the rug out from under the 'boasting' which the rival teachers have been indulging in at Corinth. Not content with the teasing parody of standard social boasting in chapter 11, Paul now comes to the heart of the matter. The other teachers have placed great emphasis on spiritual experiences, on the wonderful things they have seen in visions and revelations, on the divine or angelic words they have heard. 'Ordinary' Christians would be in awe of them. Surely they must be super-spiritual, to have that kind of experience! Surely (they will have thought) such people must have been lifted beyond the condition of folk like ourselves! And so Paul takes it upon himself to show how even the most exalted spiritual experiences are to be understood within the framework of the gospel. . . .

Now at last Paul is allowed, it seems, to reveal a direct word that he has received from God, but it isn't a word that will let him or anyone else become puffed up in their own self-importance. Instead, it is one of the most comforting, reassuring, healing and steadying 'words of the Lord' ever recorded: 'My grace is enough for you; my power comes to perfection in weakness.' This is, after all, the same lesson he was trying to teach the Corinthians at the beginning of the first letter. In a sense, it is the underlying lesson he has been trying to teach them all through. 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' God's power and human power are not only not the same thing; often the second has to be knocked out of the way altogether for the first to shine through as God desires and intends.

From Paul for Everyone 2 Corinthians by Tom Wright pp 130-133.

(f) Why do you think God did not remove the 'thorn' in Paul's flesh despite his repeated prayers (2 Cor 12:7-10)?

3. Read 2 Cor 12:11-21.

(a) Why does Paul think he's made a fool of himself (v 11)?

(b) Paul is being sarcastic again in v 13. What does he mean?

(c) What emotions is Paul expressing?

(d) Why is he so emotional?

To finish

4. Two aspects of knowing yourself come out in this section of 2 Corinthians – weakness and emotions.
(a) Why is it so hard to face up to our weaknesses?

(b) Why is it so hard to face up to our emotions?

(c) Spend some time getting to know yourself by admitting to your weaknesses and recognising the emotions you allow yourself to reveal and the emotions you try to hide.

(d) Does knowing Jesus have any bearing on facing up to your weaknesses and emotions? How?

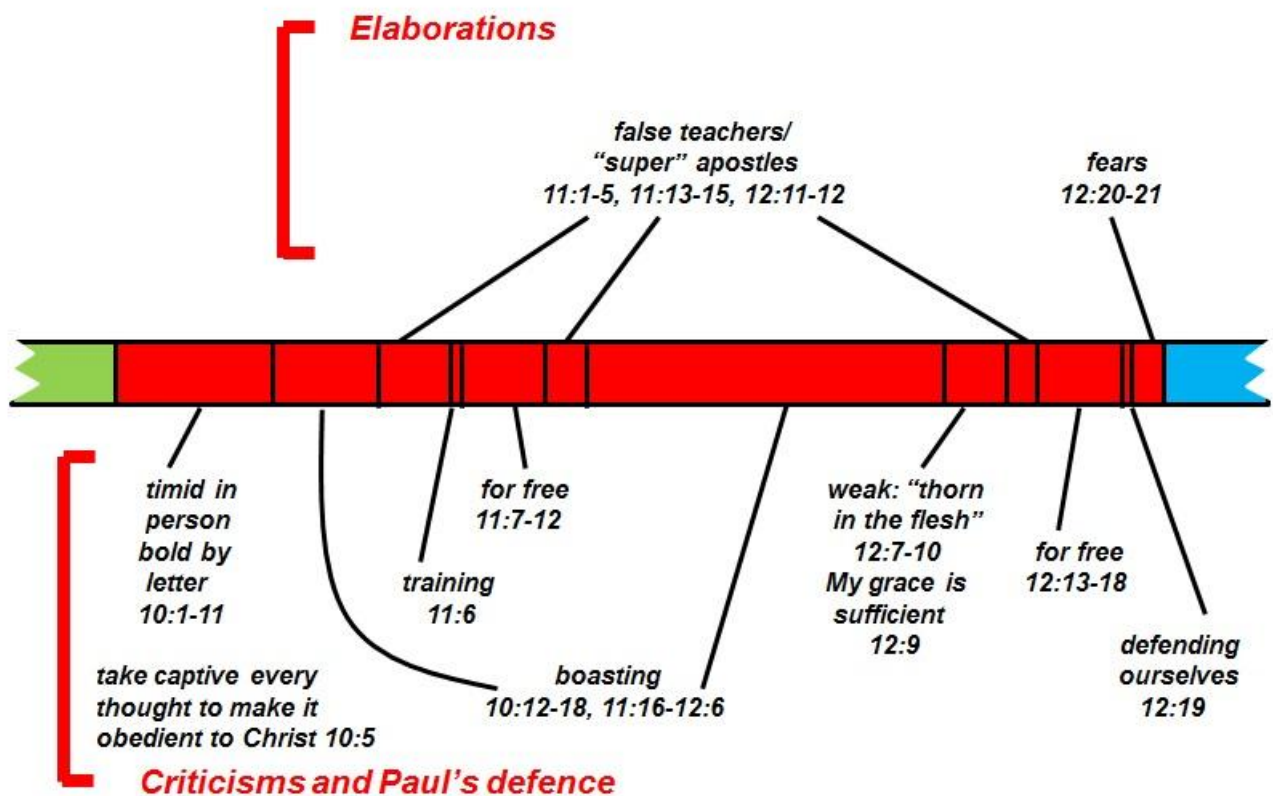
Study 9, 2 Cor ch 13, faith

Getting started

1. What is faith?
2. Do we still have faith if we have lingering doubts?



The story so far . . .



Bible

3. Read 2 Cor 13:1-4.
(a) How was Jesus crucified in *weakness* (v 4)?

(b) What is Paul's attitude in dealing with the Corinthians?
4. Read 2 Cor 13:5-14.
(a) How would you test yourself to see if you are in the faith (v 5)?

(b) What would constitute a pass and what would constitute a failure?

(c) Should we use the same criteria to judge others (see also Matt 7:1-5)?

(d) (i) What tests does Paul suggest?

(ii) How do you measure up?

5. We often think of **perfection** as getting things 100% right but the Greek word “teleios” means having reached its end (telos), finished, completed or accomplishing or bringing to completeness. So “perfect” refers to God’s final purpose and goal in creating or the capability of fulfilling a role i.e. “fit for a purpose” or the end of a developmental pathway.

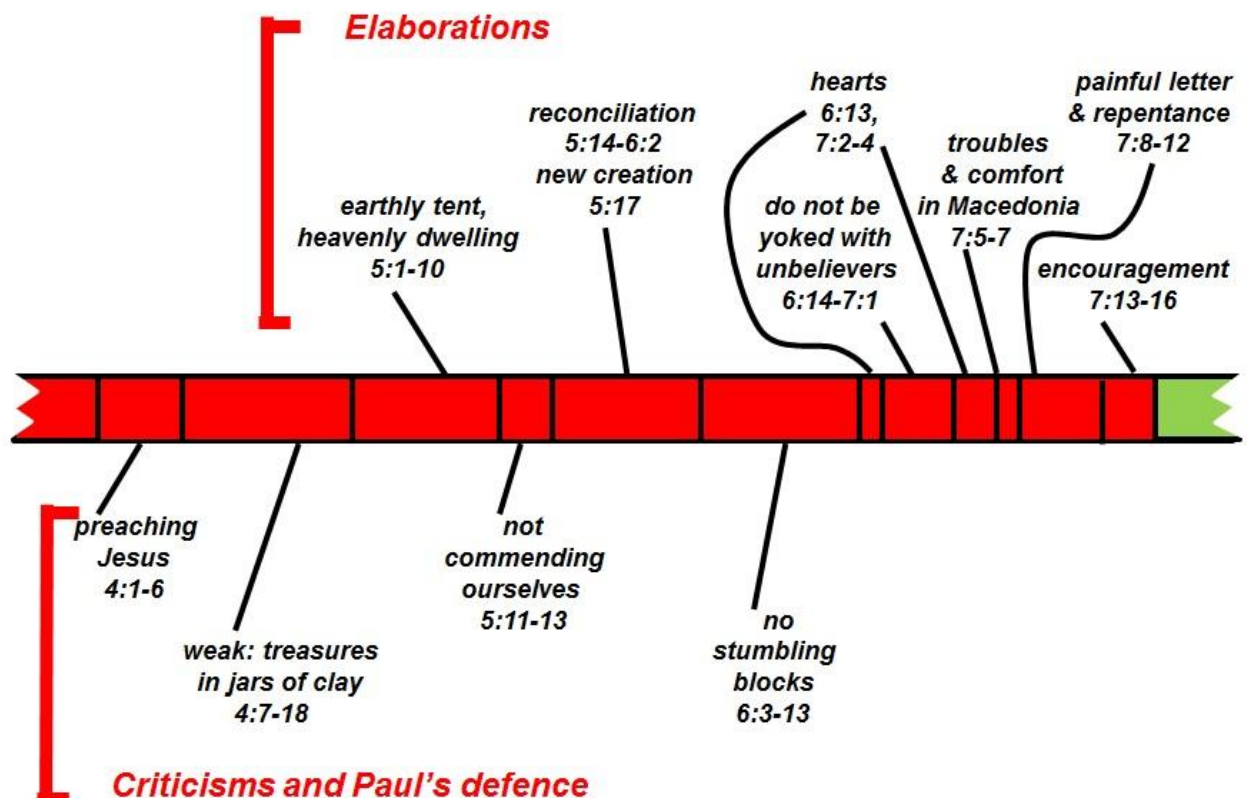
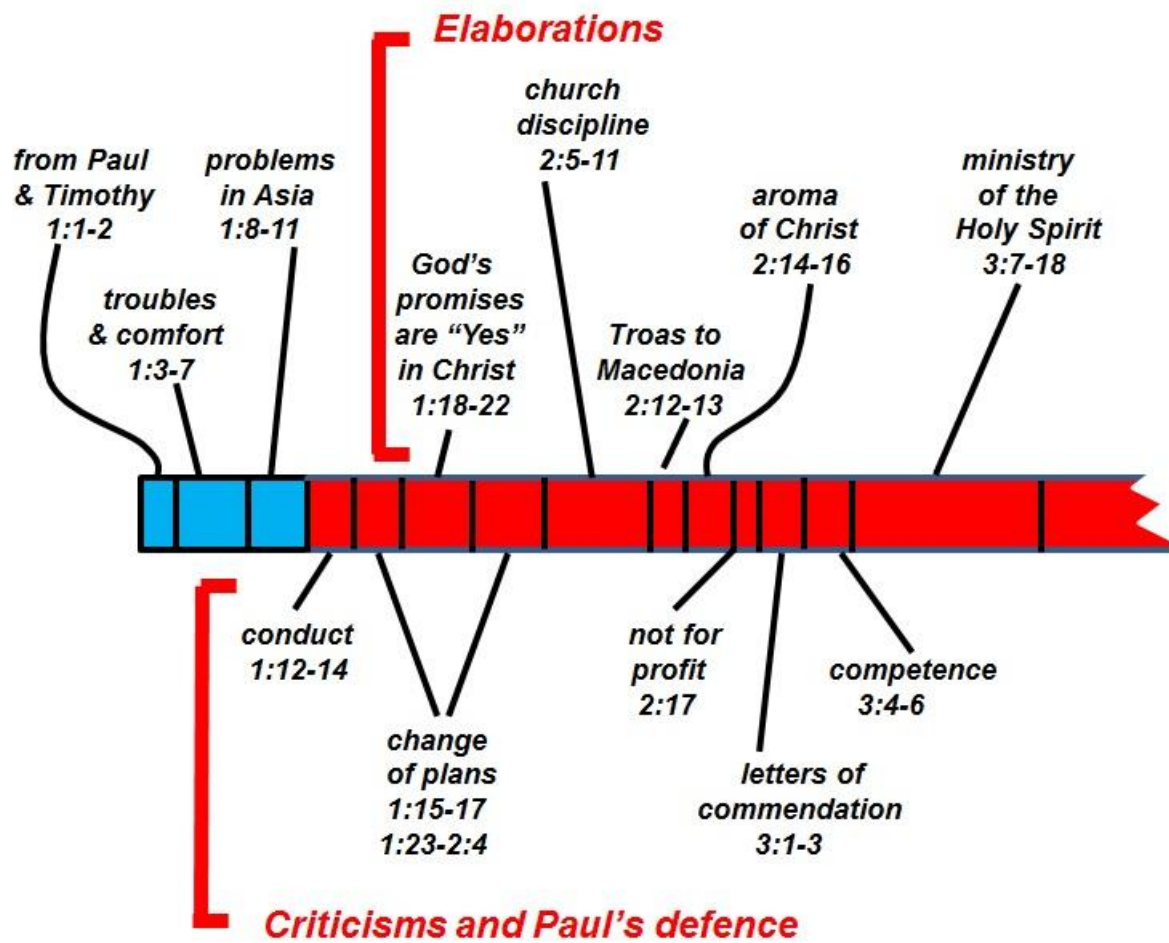
What does Paul mean if we think of “completeness” instead of “perfection” in vv 9 and 11?

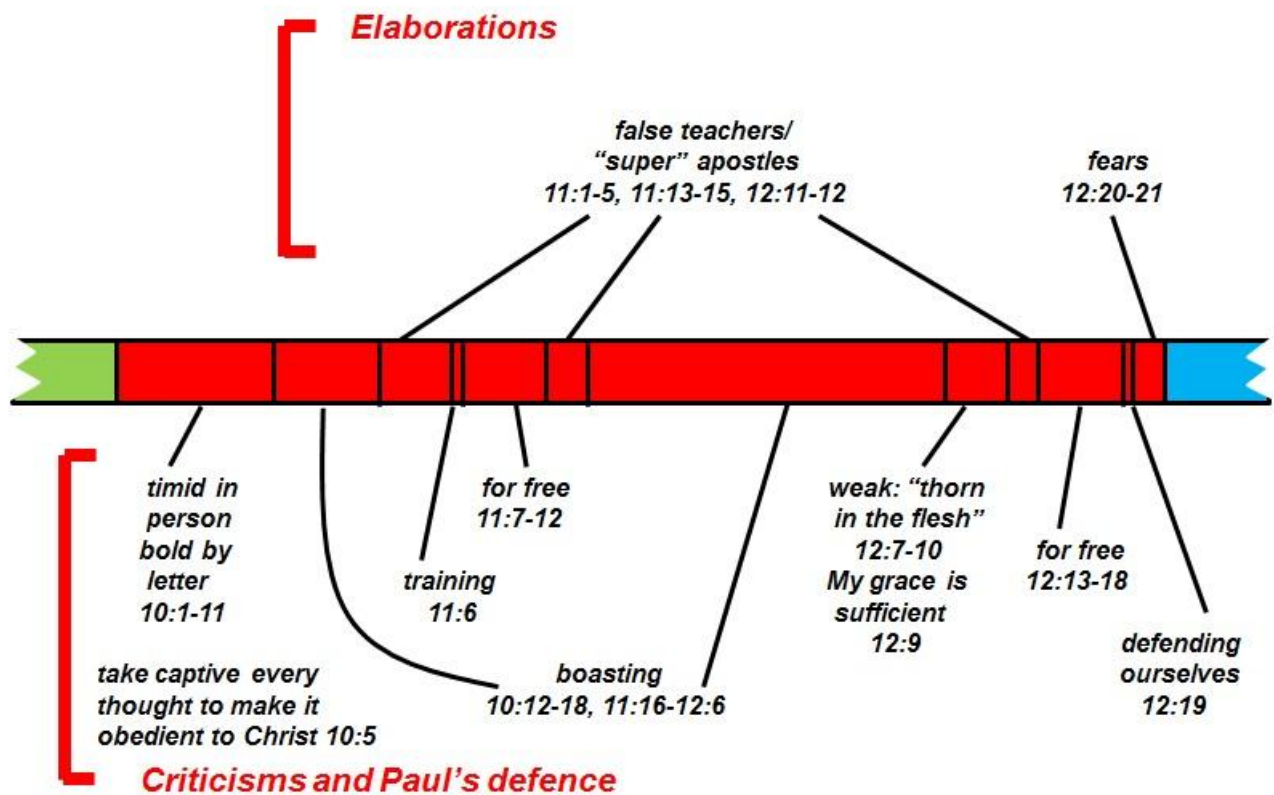
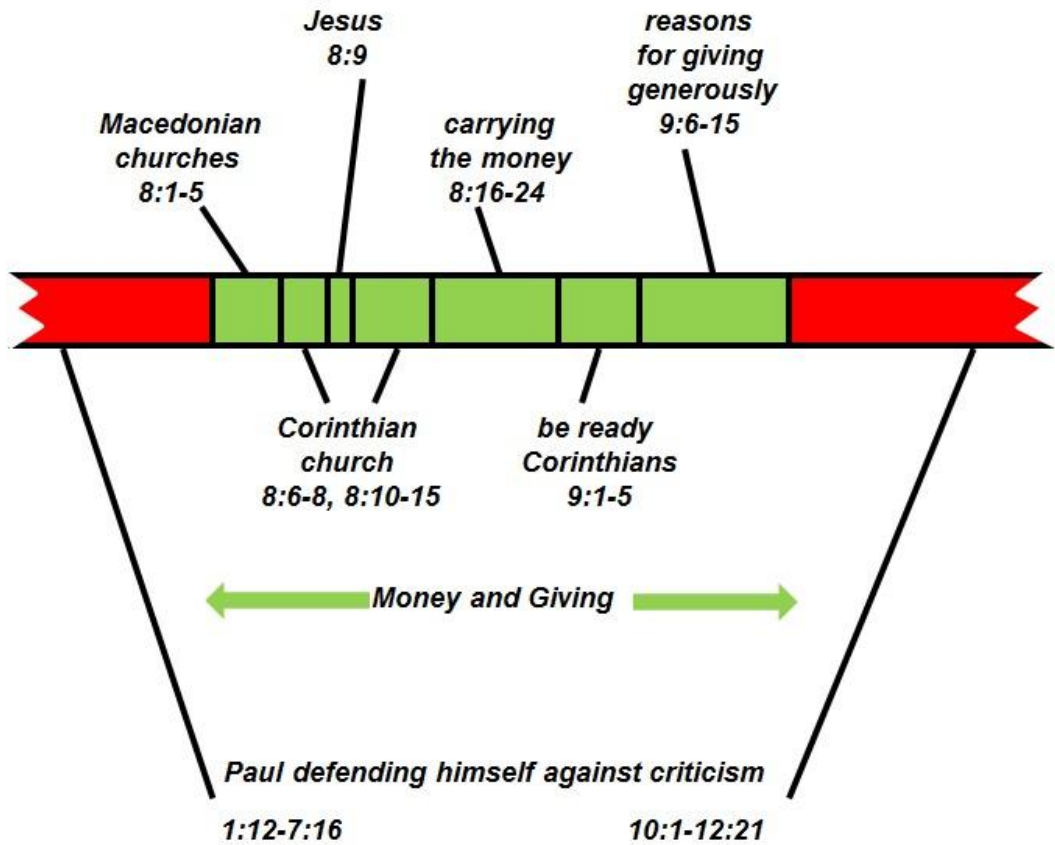
To finish

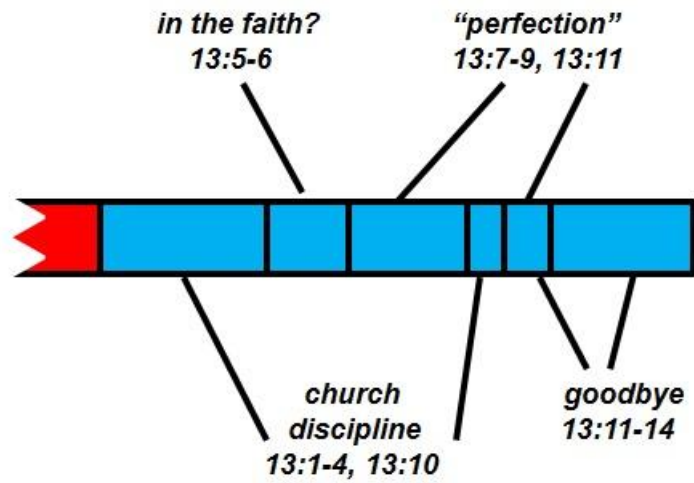
6. We usually think of Christian faith as faith in God but God also has faith in *us*.
(a) In what way would God have faith in you?

(b) How do you feel about God’s faith in you?

7. Look back over 2 Corinthians. These pictures might help:







What were the things (if any) that particularly grabbed you, or stunned you, or warmed you, or "enthused" you about these studies?