



*2 Corinthians Chapters 2–6*

B R C  
*Study the Bible  
and follow Jesus*

NT #34 Bible Reading Class  
Pastor: Wentang Wang

# A Bible Reader's Conviction

- *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17, NIV)*

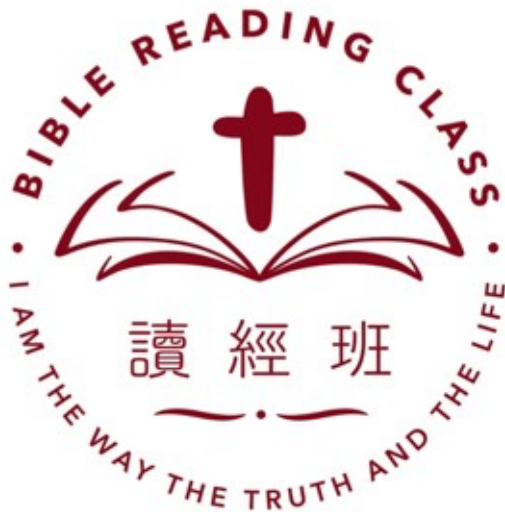
## **A Blessed Journey**

1. May you study God's Word with a reverent heart and walk in His will.
2. May the Lord's Word flourish, and may He add to the church those who are being saved.
3. May the Lord bless your days of reading the Scriptures.

## **Study the Bible, follow Jesus**

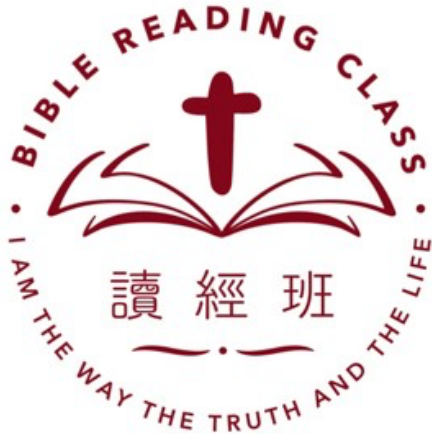


## The Guiding Principles of BRC



- Christ-Centered
- Bible-Based
- Mission-Minded

## BRC: A Gentleman's Agreement



I'll complete weekly reading assignment

I'll watch weekly teaching video in its entirety

I'll complete weekly quiz (closed book)

# The Structure of the 27 Books of the New Testament

- The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) John
- The Fourfold Gospel, Acts, The Thirteen Pauline Epistles, The Other Nine Epistles (General Epistles and Others)
- Five Books of Historical Narrative, Twenty Two Books of Doctrinal Teaching

# Outline of 2 Corinthians

- I. Paul's Defense of His Ministry — Chapters 1–7
- II. Encouragement to Give for Relief — Chapters 8–9
- III. Warnings to the Disobedient — Chapters 10–13

# “Conscience” in 2 Corinthians

## 1. One’s Own Conscience

- *“Now this is our boast: **Our conscience** testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God’s grace.” (2 Corinthians 1:12, NIV)*
- Conscience (suneidēsis, the ability to discern good and evil):  
It is the capacity to place different matters side by side and distinguish what is good from what is evil, what is right from what is wrong, and thus choose the good and reject the evil, choose what is right and turn away from what is wrong.
- Paul says: Our conscience can testify for us that in our conduct and dealings, we act with holiness and sincerity. We do not practice deceit or rely on human schemes; rather, we depend solely on God’s grace and interact with you in honesty and integrity.

# “Conscience” in 2 Corinthians

## 2. Everyone’s Conscience

- *“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to **everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.**” (2 Corinthians 4:1–2, NIV)*
- Paul related to the brothers and sisters with a clear conscience—without manipulation, without schemes, and without any hidden tactics. He did not distort God’s truth; God’s word is exactly what it is, whether people like it or not. His responsibility was simply to make the truth known. As for how others viewed them, Paul said, “Let each person follow their own conscience.” In the presence of God, they commended themselves—their lives, their ministry, and their message—to the conscience of everyone. Whether people accept it or not is up to each individual.

# “Conscience” in 2 Corinthians

## 3. Your Conscience

- *“Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to **your conscience.**” (2 Corinthians 5:11, NIV)*
- Paul was deeply concerned for the Corinthians, because they had listened to false teachers, begun to doubt him, and drifted away from the truth. Paul hoped that the Corinthians would have spiritual discernment—that their conscience would enable them to distinguish right from wrong and recognize what kind of people he and his fellow workers truly were.

## “Conscience” in 2 Corinthians

- In 2 Corinthians, Paul portrays a real world in which one lives by conscience. To “live by conscience” means believing that every person has the ability to discern right from wrong and to make the correct choice. Paul says that our conscience can testify for us—that we relate to you with God’s holiness and sincerity. We commend ourselves to each person’s conscience; whether you accept us or not is for each one to decide. As for you Corinthians, Paul hopes your conscience will clearly discern what kind of people they are.
- Paul speaks of an invisible “conscience pathway,” a route that runs from my conscience to yours, and to the conscience of every person. In a world where human hearts can be deceitful, walking this conscience pathway may seem foolish, and the outcome may at times be painful. Yet this path also feels safe and steady. More importantly, it seems deeply aligned with God’s will.
- And so Paul, Timothy, Titus, Barnabas, and Apollos walked this conscience pathway all their lives—sometimes foolishly in the eyes of the world, sometimes suffering greatly, yet always with a deep sense of peace. One wonders whether today’s believers and ministers also see this conscience pathway between people—and whether they are willing to walk on it?

# A Family Sharing Sorrow and Joy

**“I take your sorrow as my sorrow, and your joy as my joy” (2 Corinthians 1:23–2:4)**

- *“I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm. So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.” (NIV)*
- It is often said that the child who causes parents the most concern is also the one they love the most. In this passage filled with both “sorrow” and “joy,” Paul reveals his deep affection for the church in Corinth. The Corinthian church was full of problems and caused Paul much anxiety, yet he said, “I wrote to you not to make you sorrowful, but to let you know how exceedingly I love you.” Was Paul being partial? Consider this: among all the churches, the Corinthians received two of the longest letters.

## A Family Sharing Sorrow and Joy

- Paul says that the reason he did not go to Corinth immediately was to spare them—to give them time to correct their mistakes. Otherwise, if he had come and had to rebuke them, everyone would have been filled with sorrow. If they were sorrowful, he would be sorrowful as well. But if they corrected their errors, followed Jesus faithfully, and stopped straying from the truth, then he would rejoice—and their joy would become his joy. He did not want his visit to turn into an unpleasant encounter; he simply wanted to contribute to their joy and enjoy genuine fellowship with them.
- Paul regarded the Corinthians as his own children, binding together the family’s sorrow and joy. His joy was rooted in their relationship with God: when the Corinthians drifted from the truth, Paul grieved; when they repented and returned to the right path, Paul rejoiced. And what about the Corinthians? Paul told them, **“I am confident that all of you share in my joy.”** These wayward children had at least one virtue—they cared about their spiritual father’s feelings. Whenever they sensed Paul was upset, they stopped fooling around and whispered to one another, “Stop it—Paul is upset!”
- In Paul’s writing, we see a portrait of a “family that shares sorrow and joy.” It is beautiful and warm. One wonders whether such a relationship can also exist between today’s churches and their ministers ?

# Show Him Unwavering Love

- *“If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.” (2 Corinthians 2:5–11, NIV)*
  - In the church, trouble is often caused by only a small number of people. Just a few individuals, through their words and actions, can throw the entire congregation into turmoil. Paul says that you cannot simply ignore such people—you must exercise church discipline. However, once the discipline has reached its proper extent and the person realizes his mistake, he should be forgiven. Moreover, he must be comforted, lest he be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow and become completely discouraged (even ruined). Satan often seizes such opportunities to sow division and disrupt the church, and we are not unaware of his schemes. For this reason, the church must practice discipline while also demonstrating steadfast love; neither can be neglected, or mistakes will surely follow.
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# The Fragrance of Christ

- *“But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?” (2 Corinthians 2:14–16, NIV)*
  - Paul says that Christians carry a kind of “fragrance” that comes from knowing Christ. The conduct and life of believers are a kind of “triumphal procession,” like a victorious Roman army returning home with captives, marching through the capital amid drums, celebration, and clouds of incense. Paul says that we are this triumphal procession, spreading the fragrance of Christ wherever we go. To some who reject this fragrance, it becomes a “smell of death,” leading to death; but to those who receive it, it becomes a “fragrance of life,” leading to life. Faced with consequences so weighty, who is sufficient for such a task? Paul answers in 3:5: *“Not that we are competent in ourselves... but our competence comes from God.”*
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# Principles of Preaching

- *“Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.” (2 Corinthians 2:17, NIV)*
  - In Paul’s time, there were people who *“peddled the word of God for profit.”* As long as they could gain something by pleasing others, they did not hesitate to distort God’s message. But Paul says, “We are not like them.” When he preached, he spoke *\*in Christ\** and proclaimed God’s word with sincerity before God.
  - Some people enter “ministry” with personal gain already calculated—whether for themselves or for their organizations. They treat godliness as *“a means of gain” (1 Timothy 6:5)*, thereby corrupting God’s word. Paul insists that preaching must be done with honesty, faithful to God’s message, and spoken in God’s presence through Christ. Brothers and sisters, we deeply need such pulpits today, and we deeply need such preachers.
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# The Church as Christ's Letter of Recommendation

- *“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” (2 Corinthians 3:1–3, NIV)*
- Paul says that the Corinthians are his letter of recommendation. Others look at this chaotic, disorderly church and say to Paul, “Paul, are you serious? This letter of recommendation looks terrible—who would dare invite you after reading it?”
- Was Paul mistaken? Shouldn't he have said that the Philippian church was his letter of recommendation instead? Why would he point to Corinth? Yet Paul took pride in the Corinthians, saying, *“You are clearly a letter of Christ, prepared by us.”* Paul saw them move from unbelief to faith, from repeated failures to gradual correction and growth. Without despising them, he declared, *“You are our letter of recommendation!”*
- Paul is truly Paul—honest, courageous, and full of spiritual insight. He did not say, “The Corinthian church has nothing to do with me.” Instead, he looked beyond the surface and saw the spiritual reality. To the Corinthians he said, *“This letter is not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”* After encouraging them, Paul went on to speak about the Spirit and the heart.

# Removing the Veil in Bible Reading

- *“But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (2 Corinthians 3:14–17, NIV)*
  - Some people read the Scriptures, there is a veil over their hearts, preventing them from seeing God’s word clearly. When Moses first received God’s word, his face shone, and the Israelites were afraid, so Moses covered his face with a veil. Paul says that among you there are some who “read the Scriptures with a veil,” reading in confusion and obscurity. Some read only the surface of the text but fail to grasp the true meaning within. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Paul says that whenever you turn to the Lord—not to the law, not to the letter, not to religion, but to the Lord—the veil over your heart is removed. You will receive freedom, for the Spirit of the Lord brings freedom. You will no longer be bound by the law, no longer be a rigid Pharisee, but will walk freely in Christ.
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# Where the Spirit of the Lord Is, There Is Freedom

- *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:17–18, NIV)*
  - Legalists infiltrated the church, saying, “God’s word says this,” “The Lord’s word says that.” “You must be circumcised, keep the law, do this, do that; otherwise you are not good Christians, or even not saved.” Paul says, “How can that be?” These are people who “read Scripture with a veil,” and they want you to read with a veil just like them. They create many restrictions and many bonds, making people less and less free as they read Scripture.
  - Paul says, *“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”* You, Christian, read with an unveiled face, not with a veil, and you behold the glory of the Lord. You are like a mirror reflecting the ever-increasing glory of the Lord Jesus. This is the result of spiritual reading—receiving the Spirit-filled meaning of God’s word, enjoying freedom in Christ, and reflecting the Lord’s glory.
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# Blinded by the God of This World

- *“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4, NIV)*
  - *“The god of this world”* refers to Satan. The unbelieving have had their minds blinded by Satan. In 2 Corinthians, *“the unbelieving”* does not refer to Gentiles who do not believe in the Lord, but to Jews who claimed to believe yet insisted that others keep the law. During Paul’s missionary journeys, these were the ones who persecuted him the most. They rejected the gospel Paul preached and drove him from city to city. After the churches were established, legalists infiltrated them. They were false brothers and false teachers, instructing believers to be circumcised, to keep the law, to avoid this and not touch that. Paul says these people have been blinded by Satan—they are blind themselves, yet love to teach others, blind guides leading the blind.
  - In the modern church, there are also people *“whose minds have been blinded by the god of this world.”* They do not preach circumcision, but they preach the prosperity gospel, the social gospel, psychology, success theology—everything except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
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# Treasure in Jars of Clay

- *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” (2 Corinthians 4:7–10, NIV)*
  - This extraordinarily magnificent passage is Paul’s declaration of faith and also the victory anthem of every believer.
  - We are fragile jars of clay, of little worth, yet we contain a treasure. The treasure is Jesus Christ. With Him inside you, the clay jar undergoes a transformation—not only strengthened, but priceless.
  - Paul says that having Jesus within you does not exempt you from hardship or persecution, but it gives you great power to overcome them. You will still be pressed on every side, tormented inwardly, persecuted, and struck down to the ground. But you will not be crushed, not despair, not shattered. You remain a jar—not a fragile jar, but a jar containing treasure, unbreakable.
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# Outwardly Wasting Away, Inwardly Renewed Day by Day

- *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly (anthropos) we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16–18, NIV)*
- Paul mentioned two things: one we know, and one we do not know. We know that the outer body will decay. As we age, our physical functions decline day by day. Some people live hard lives, exposed to wind and sun, and they age even faster. People like Paul, who risked their lives for the gospel and suffered constantly, experienced physical deterioration even more rapidly. What we do not know is that a person whose outer body is perishing can still have an “inner being renewed day by day.”
- It turns out that besides the outer person, believers also have an inner person. While the outer person is gradually wasting away, the inner person grows in the opposite direction—being renewed day by day. Paul teaches that this “inner renewal” is a spiritual reality. In Christ, a person’s inner life can become more vibrant with each passing day.

# Outwardly Wasting Away, Inwardly Renewed Day by Day

- Paul said, *“I believed, and therefore I spoke.”* The One who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus. (4:13–14) Paul served the Lord with the conviction of resurrection, and he lived daily by that same resurrection faith. He lived toward life, not toward death. He said that this spiritual reality is seen through the eyes of faith. In comparison, what we suffer now is only *“light and momentary affliction,”* but what we will receive is *“an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”*
  - Brothers and sisters, we must have spiritual sight to behold the eternal glory. We take great care of our bodies—watching what we eat and drink, exercising, taking supplements, applying skincare and cosmetics. These are good, but their effect is limited. They may slow aging, but they cannot stop the inevitable decay of the outer body. Time spares no one; aging comes to all. What we must grasp is the reality that *“the inner person is being renewed day by day.”* With the conviction that “to live toward Christ is to live toward life,” we allow our minds to be renewed and transformed, so that we may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)
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# On Death and Resurrection

- *“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit.” (2 Corinthians 5:1–5, NIV)*
- This precious passage opens a window for us, allowing us to look upward from the despair of this present life and see a future filled with hope. We all know that life is limited; as we walk day by day, we will eventually reach the end of our earthly journey. And after the end—what then? Is there still a way forward? Paul, with the theme *“what is mortal will be swallowed up by life,”* unfolds before us the beautiful future that awaits Christians.
- Paul says that death is like moving to a new home. Our increasingly decaying body is only a tent, a temporary shelter for travelers. One day, when the journey is over and the tent is taken down, you will return to your heavenly home and dwell in an eternal house.

## On Death and Resurrection

- Paul says that death is like changing clothes—taking off one garment and putting on another. What we take off is a “tent-grade” garment, but what we put on is a “house-grade” garment; the difference between the two is immeasurable. Honestly, this “tent-grade” garment is of poor quality. We *“groan and are burdened”* while living in this tent; it is tiring and difficult.
  - But are you sure you will have a house to live in afterward? If you leave the tent and have no house to enter, it would be like taking off old clothes without having new clothes to wear—would that not leave you naked? Paul says, do not worry; you will never be left naked. You will dwell in the heavenly house and be clothed with a beautiful new garment.
  - Therefore, what we call death is actually *“the mortal being swallowed up by life.”* Notice carefully: it is not life being swallowed by death, but death being swallowed by life. This is essential knowledge for every child of God. Without this understanding, you cannot live your days well.
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# Renewal and Ministry in Christ

- *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:17–20, NIV)*
- If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. It is not the old you trying to reform yourself, but God recreating you in Christ. You are a new creation (ktisis), and the old you has passed away; the new you is now in Christ. God sees you as righteous and credits His righteousness to you through faith in Jesus Christ. God has a plan for this new you—to do the good works that are pleasing in His sight.
- *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)*

## Renewal and Ministry in Christ

- In Christ, the old has passed away and all things have become new. The mistakes you made in the past are no longer remembered by God, so you should not keep remembering them either. You are a new creation in Christ—look forward, and do what is good in God’s eyes. Those religious rules, whether the circumcision and law-keeping of the apostolic era or the various regulations in modern churches, Paul says these are not what truly matter.
  - *“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.” (Galatians 6:15–16)*
  - Besides having a new beginning, we also receive a new ministry—*the ministry of reconciling people to God*. Paul says that because of sin, humanity is in a state of hostility toward God, but through God’s Son Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to Him (Romans 5:10). Every new creation is an “ambassador for Christ,” like a representative of the kingdom of heaven, urging people to be reconciled to God. Note that this beautiful ministry is not only for preachers; it belongs to every person who has been made new.
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# God Made the Sinless One Become Sin, and the Unrighteous Become Righteous

## God Made Him Who Had No Sin Become Sin

- *“God made him who had no sin (literally: who did not know sin) to be sin (or sin offering) for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV)*
  - This verse is a condensed expression of the gospel and is worth memorizing. “He who knew no sin” refers to Jesus Christ, who became sin on our behalf. The word “sin” can also mean “sin offering.” When a person is in Christ, he becomes “the righteousness of God”—that is, God’s own righteousness credited to all who believe through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22).
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# How to Recognize a True Servant of God?

1. They seem to mislead others, yet they are truthful;
  2. They seem unknown, yet they are well known;
  3. They seem to be dying, yet they live;
  4. They seem punished, yet not destroyed;
  5. They seem sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;
  6. They seem poor, yet make many rich;
  7. They seem to have nothing, yet possess everything.
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# Appearance and Reality

## 1. “As deceivers, yet true”:

How do we discern a servant of God? We look at whether the person is honest—that is, genuine. Is he real or fake? Does he truly love the Lord? Is his calling real? Is his service to God sincere? What matters most is not outward appearance but the heart. Other things can be improved or corrected, but sincerity cannot be faked. Can you see a person’s true heart?

## 2. “As unknown, yet well known”:

In the original text, the word “men” is not present; it can be translated as “seemingly unknown, yet deeply known.” What does this mean?

First, a servant of God may appear obscure and unnoticed, yet he is deeply known by God.

Second, a servant of God may seem hidden and unnoticed, yet he is deeply known by certain people.

A true servant may not enjoy fame, but he is well known to God and well known to those who truly know him. Can you discern people rightly?

# Appearance and Reality

## 3. “As dying, yet behold—we live”:

A servant of God faces pressures inside and attacks outside, struck down repeatedly and seemingly at the point of death, yet possesses a resilient life that rises again. Paul was once stoned by a mob and left for dead outside the city, yet he stood up and walked away. This is true not only of the body but even more of the inner life. A true servant of God endures trials, rises after being struck down, and lives because the life of the Lord is within him. Can you see this inner life?

## 4. “As chastened, yet not killed”:

- Everyone experiences setbacks and blows. Some, when struck too many times, never recover. But a servant of God is different—though struck, he is not destroyed; he always rises again, keeps his heart steadfast, and continues serving the Lord. Can you recognize a ministry that is sustained by true spiritual life?

# Appearance and Reality

## 5. “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”:

Whether a person is joyful cannot always be seen from outward appearance. He may not always look energetic or wear a constant smile. At times he may appear sorrowful, yet joy remains within. The joy of God’s servant is rooted in the Lord Himself; even when outwardly burdened by many concerns, there is deep inner joy. Can you perceive the joy that exists within sorrow?

## 6. “As poor, yet making many rich”:

This is the opposite of what the prosperity gospel promotes. Believers are not necessarily materially wealthy, especially the servants of God. Though they may not possess much, they enrich the hearts and lives of many by proclaiming Jesus and speaking God’s Word. Can you recognize the one who makes others truly rich?

# Appearance and Reality

## 7. “As having nothing, yet possessing everything”:

Jesus had no place to lay His head while on earth—He seemed to have nothing, yet He possessed everything. In the same way, God makes His servants abundant—not necessarily in worldly ways, but with every provision they need, lacking nothing. Can you see this “having everything in Christ”?

- Paul urged the Corinthians to look carefully at him and recognize that he truly was a servant of God—to believe the gospel he preached and to follow his teaching, for their edification. The Corinthians lacked discernment; they mistook false apostles for true ones and true apostles for false ones, resulting in confusion and many problems within the church.
  - The “*as... yet...*” characteristics Paul lists are not only marks of God’s servants but also marks of God’s children. We all have an outward appearance before people, and we all have an inward reality before God.
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# How Should a Church Relate to Its Pastor?

- *“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.” (2 Corinthians 6:11–13, NIV)*

Two principles:

1. The mouth is open
  2. The heart is generous
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# The Mouth Is Open

- Paul said, “O Corinthians, our mouth is open to you.”  
The mouth is a tool for communication. When a church and its pastor maintain healthy communication, misunderstandings decrease and relationships grow.
- Statistics show that more than 80% of churches in the United States are small to medium-sized.  
Many pastors work alone without coworkers. Most pastors are introverted and naturally speak little; without coworkers to talk to, the lack of communication becomes even heavier.
- Congregants usually only hear the pastor preach on Sundays, and during the week no one interacts with the pastor.  
People seek out the pastor only when problems arise. With so little communication between both sides, misunderstandings easily occur. As a result, most pastors’ tenures last less than three years, often ending unhappily.

# The Mouth Is Open

- How can this situation be improved?

It sounds simple, but it is not easy to do. The first step is communication—ideally, natural communication. Pastors should take the initiative to speak to the church, and the church should take the initiative to speak to the pastor.

- But who exactly is “the church”?

When you say the church should communicate more with the pastor, everyone nods and says, “Yes, that’s right!” Yet six months later, no one has spoken to the pastor, and nothing has changed. What happened? It’s like the saying, “When one person fetches water, there is water to drink; when ten people fetch water, no one gets any.” What belongs to everybody ends up belonging to nobody. Everyone nods, but no one acts. The church remains the same.

- A more practical approach is to establish some kind of structure.

For example, the elders and deacons could have a monthly meal with the pastor, or even a weekly fellowship time, to maintain healthy communication. This is a “necessary solution,” because without some kind of structure, no one will open their mouth.

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# A Heart That Is Wide

- In addition to “an open mouth,” we also need “a wide heart.” Both open communication and a generous heart must work together. Paul said to the Corinthians, *“Our heart is wide open to you; you also should open your hearts to us.”*
- When the heart is narrow, there will be much criticism, much dissatisfaction, much suspicion, and many judgments spoken behind people’s backs. If we are honest, we must admit that there are quite a few narrow-hearted people in the church. When one person begins to nitpick and criticize, many others resonate with it. Idle talk spreads easily and is quickly believed, flying everywhere. On the other hand, when someone offers praise or encouragement, people become suspicious of their motives. Good words rarely travel far, but bad words spread a thousand miles—this is often the reality within the church.

## A Heart That Is Wide

- Many pastors, being introverted and often working in isolation, can easily become narrow-hearted.

Paul's approach was this: his heart was first wide open toward the Corinthians, and then he asked the Corinthians to open their hearts toward him.

- The pastor takes the lead in being generous-hearted, but he does not remain silent as if relying on his own elegance or refinement.

He openly states that his heart is wide, and he asks the church to respond with the same attitude. This is the best approach—first the pastor initiates, then the church responds.

- Paul spoke plainly, without any hint of subtlety:

“I have opened my heart to you; you must open your heart to me!”

I find this excellent. A straightforward approach is often the most effective.

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# The Principle of Holiness

- *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?” (2 Corinthians 6:14–16, NIV)*
- This passage is not about marriage but about daily living. The scope of life is broader than marriage. In daily life, disciples are called to remain holy. The most important command is “do not worship idols.” This means not only avoiding temples where idols are worshiped, but also avoiding close, blended associations with those who worship idols in everyday life.

What is an idol?

Not only wood and stone, but anything the mind and heart follow—ideas, beliefs, values, or objects of devotion.

What does it mean to be “closely joined” with idol-worshippers?

It refers to intimate relationships in daily living.

Paul uses five contrasting rhetorical questions to explain the concept of “do not be unequally yoked”:

# The Principle of Holiness

- “You are not compatible with unbelievers; do not be unequally yoked with them.”
  1. What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?
  2. What fellowship has light with darkness?
  3. What harmony has Christ with Belial (Belial is another name for Satan)?
  4. What share has a believer with an unbeliever?
  5. What agreement has the temple of God with idols?

# The Principle of Holiness

- “The temple of God” refers to the believer.  
You—God’s temple—what do you have in common with idols? Why would you be yoked together with idols?
- The five terms—partnership, fellowship, harmony, in common, and agreement (NASB)—all refer to intimate relationships in daily life.
- These are not casual connections, not mere acquaintances, but partnership, fellowship, harmony, sharing in common, and agreement.  
Brothers and sisters, these describe close relationships.

# The Principle of Holiness

- Believers may have ordinary relationships with unbelievers—greeting them, interacting in daily life—but must not form intimate relationships, especially at the level of the heart.

- A disciple's inner life is holy and belongs to one Lord.

If you blend closely with unbelievers, their beliefs will quietly enter your heart.

- When you try to fill a heart that belongs to the Lord with idols, the Holy One cannot dwell with what is unclean.

He must withdraw.

You may think keeping a few idols in your heart is harmless, but in reality, the Lord does not coexist with idols—He leaves, and the idols remain.

# The Principle of Holiness

- The holy God cannot dwell with what is unclean.  
This is like the vision seen by the prophet Ezekiel: the glory of the LORD slowly rose and reluctantly departed from the throne. It paused at the threshold of the temple, then at the east gate, and finally departed completely.
  - Why did the LORD leave Israel?  
Because Israel filled the temple with detestable idols, defiling God's house. A holy God cannot dwell with impurity, so His glory departed from Israel.
  - When Christians harbor idols in their hearts—following thoughts and ideologies that oppose God—the outcome is the same.
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