

II CORINTHIANS

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

This quote from II Corinthians is often included in our worship as a greeting. It is actually Paul's farewell benediction to his beloved brothers and sisters in Corinth.

II Corinthians is a letter to a beloved congregation from their founding pastor, the Apostle Paul. He had lived in the busy Greek seaport of Corinth for over 18 months. While earning his living as a tentmaker, he told Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) about Jesus. A diverse, energetic congregation developed there. You can read more about Paul and the start of this congregation in Acts 18.

Paul's missionary ministry took him to many other places in the areas we now call Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, and Italy, but he kept in touch through letters and visitors. While at Ephesus (in modern Turkey), he began a series of letters. The first is lost to us. He received a reply (also lost to us) and his answer back is the book of the Bible we call I Corinthians. The letters continue as Paul continues to teach, correct, comfort, and inspire them. The later correspondence is II Corinthians. It is probably several letters collected together.

Highlights in this letter include:

- Consolation in time of suffering (1:1-11)
 - *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we are consoled by God. (1:3,4)*
- Welcoming back repentant sinners (2:5-11)
- Basis for evangelism and ministries of reconciliation (5:11 – 6:13)

- *“So we are ambassadors for Christ.” (5:20)*
- *“Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation!” (6:2)*
- The first world hunger collection and the basis for our stewardship
 - *“God loves a cheerful giver.” (9:15)*
- God's strength and our weakness
 - *“My grace is sufficient for you.” (12:1-10)*
 - *Paul shares his own suffering and joy as a source of inspiration and insight for all who walk by faith and not by sight.*

In Paul's earlier letter (I Corinthians), he commends this congregation for their vitality, strong leadership, and emphasis on grace. He was very concerned about divisions, disrespect for poorer believers, quarreling, and lawsuits. They have a strong understanding that “all is forgiven” but a dangerous misunderstanding that sexual immorality is therefore acceptable. In Lutheran language, they have not grasped that God's word is Law and Gospel. They are all Gospel. Therefore, Paul corrects the faithful, rebukes troublemakers and gives instructions to shun those who persist in deliberate sinful behavior. (Read I Corinthians 6, 7, and 8 if you want more details.)

Now Paul wants them to welcome back the repentant sinner. He shares very personally from his own suffering and his own joy in knowing and serving Jesus. He is apologetic and boastful, comforting, and challenging.

We regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know hi no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (5:16-17)