

AMBASSADORS

READING PLAN

How to Use the Ambassadors Reading Guide

We hope you find this reading guide beneficial. Pastor Andrew is always encouraging the congregation to read the book we are going through along with the series, and we wanted to provide a tool that would both encourage you and help you in that endeavor.

This reading guide breaks down 2 Corinthians 5:1-6:2 into 1-2 verses a day, lasting through the entire series. We have also provided an introduction to 2 Cor. 5 as a whole to help you get an understanding of the general context. We recommend reading through that before you begin the daily reading. Here are the steps:

01 Pray for Wisdom
Paul says that only the Spirit can know the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11), and James says that it is God who gives wisdom (James 1:5). So, praying to God for wisdom in studying his word is essential to Bible reading.

02 Read the Passage/Commentary
Read the verses selected, and try to interpret them on your own. Then, after you have thought about them, read the commentary for the day to see if there were some things that you missed.

03 Pray the Bible
Were there things that the passage told you about God that you can praise and thank him for? Were there things taught about the Christian life that you struggle to obey? Pray for the desire and the strength to obey those things.

Dropping right into the middle of a letter is not easy when wanting to interpret a chapter properly. So, this introduction is designed to set the backdrop. What is it that we are getting into when we start reading 2 Corinthians 5?

Letters to the Corinthians

It is widely accepted among scholars that first and second Corinthians were actually only two of four letters that Paul sent the church. Here is a timeline for Paul's visits and letters to the church at Corinth:

1. First visit: Paul planted the church in Corinth in AD 50-52 (Acts 18).
2. Paul wrote the "previous letter" (1 Cor 5:9, 11; "Corinthians A").
3. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in AD 53/54 (1 Cor 16:8; "Corinthians B").
4. Second visit: the "painful visit" (2 Cor 2:1; see 12:14; 13:1-2).
5. Paul wrote the "severe letter" (2 Cor 2:4; 7:8; "Corinthians C").
6. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in AD 54/55 (2 Cor 7:5; 8:1; 9:2; "Corinthians D").
7. Third visit (Acts 20:2).

So, if this is the case, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians after an extensive personal and written relationship with the church of Corinth.

The Purpose of 2 Corinthians

Paul's relationship with the Corinthians had become strained because new teachers had come into the church who started casting doubt on Paul's ministry and motivations. While 2 Corinthians addresses some specific issues like why Paul hadn't come to visit them when he said he was going to, the reinstatement of a church member, and a monetary collection for the church at Jerusalem, a large portion of the letter is Paul's defending his ministry and conduct from the accusations of these "super-apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5).

2 Corinthians chapter five comes in the middle of Paul's defense and explanation of his ministry starting in 2:12 and ending in 7:16.

Paul's Opponents

Most commentators would say that the key to interpreting much of the letter well is identifying who Paul's opponents were and what they taught. Based on the letter itself, we can say this about them: (1) The intruders claimed a relationship with Christ and an apostolic authority superior to Paul's. (2) They supported these claims with letters of recommendation and boasts of their Jewish heritage, eloquence, boldness, missionary accomplishments, ecstatic experiences, miracles, and special knowledge gleaned from visionary experiences. (3) They were critical of Paul for being weak, having poor skills in public speaking, being a ne'er-do-well who suffered almost constant hardship, and lacking the confidence to expect financial support from the Corinthians.

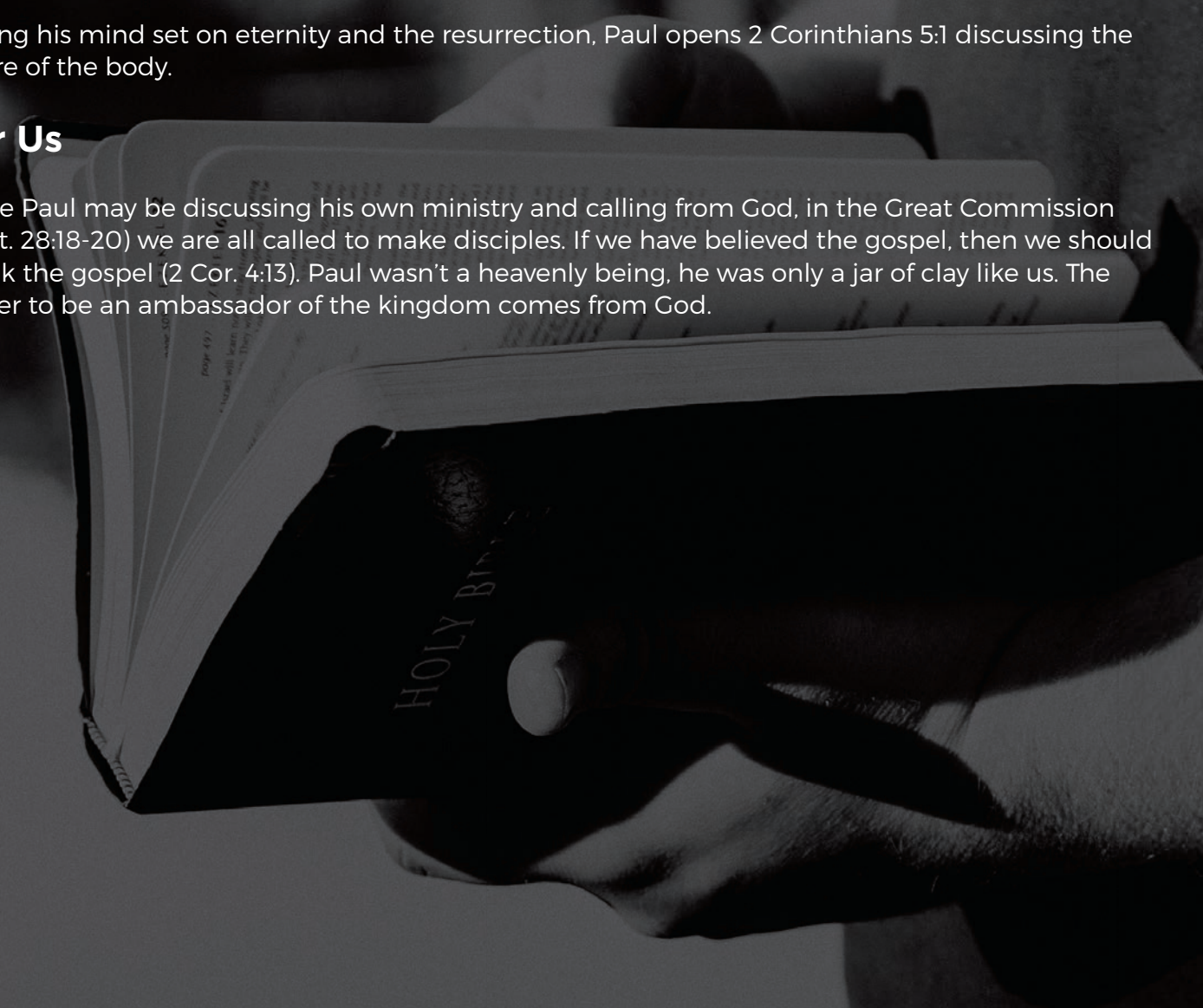
The Context of Chapter 5

As chapter five starts, Paul is in the middle of defending and explaining his ministry in light of the claims of his opponents. In the last half of chapter four, Paul explained that God placed the gospel message in “jars of clay” (4:7), so that he might show the world that the power of gospel ministry comes from God, not humans. Paul says that he and the apostles have experienced suffering after suffering, but they could do nothing else because they had to speak what they believed. And it was the hope of the resurrection that led them to continue in their ministry of spreading the gospel, even in the face of death. Paul says that all his suffering was for the benefit of the church, so that there might be thanksgiving among more and more people to the glory of God (4:15).

Having his mind set on eternity and the resurrection, Paul opens 2 Corinthians 5:1 discussing the future of the body.

For Us

While Paul may be discussing his own ministry and calling from God, in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) we are all called to make disciples. If we have believed the gospel, then we should speak the gospel (2 Cor. 4:13). Paul wasn't a heavenly being, he was only a jar of clay like us. The power to be an ambassador of the kingdom comes from God.



Read 2 Corinthians 5:1

1 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Paul has just finished discussing that he and the apostles press on in their ministry in spite of all the suffering they experience, because they know that their future is full of eternal glory. The current physical realm as they know it is temporary, so they focus on what will last forever (4:16-18). When Paul says “tent” here, he is referring to the physical body. He is saying, “If we are killed, we know it’s better for us anyway because God will replace this tent with a building that God himself built, and it is waiting for us in heaven.” The fear of physical and emotional attack that comes with sharing the gospel is conquered through having our thoughts set on the future that God has promised us. All our lives are coming to an end sooner or later. Will we spend the days for ourselves or our Lord?

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Ask God to give you a clear vision of the future he has prepared for you, so that you will be bold when you invite people to church for Easter.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:2-3

2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.

While Christians live in their fleshly bodies, which are marred by sin and pain and sickness, they pray and plead, longing to put on the transformed body that God has for them. Paul then makes an important point. Everyone, both believer and non, will be resurrected before the final judgment. But only some will be resurrected in a new, glorious body that is free from the world’s stain. Paul is saying that those who believe that God will clothe them with glory are the ones who truly groan and long for what God has prepared.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that God would bring you into conversation with people who are tired of the suffering in the world and who need to hear the good news of the resurrection at our Easter services.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:4

4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Paul keeps speaking in metaphor, which makes this a bit difficult to understand, but this is an extremely important Scripture. Many Christians mistakenly groan about their sin, health, sadness, etc., longing to leave their miserable body and go live a spiritual-only eternity in heaven. But Paul clarifies that Christians shouldn't be burdened to leave their broken bodies forever but for our bodies to be resurrected and transformed to live what is truly life forever. Our future is that we will be restored to what it truly means to be human; our future is in a body that is transformed by the Spirit of God.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that everyone in attendance at Easter will understand that the true Christian hope is resurrection, just as Jesus raised from the dead.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:5

5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

We are being prepared for the resurrection by God by the giving of his Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit in us is our guarantee that we will be resurrected in glory. Why? Because it is the same Spirit that raised Christ (Rom. 8:11).

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that God would give faith and the Spirit to many who come on Easter so that they might share in the resurrection of the righteous.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-8

6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Even in the midst of all his suffering and near-death experiences, Paul says he is confident of the resurrection (the ESV says “good courage,” but most commentators agree that “confidence” is the right translation) because God gives his Spirit as a guarantee to believers (v. 5). Paul says that he and the apostles know that as long as Christians are walking in their fleshly body by faith (as in, we don’t now see Jesus face to face but live out of belief), then we know that we are away from the Lord. But Paul remains confident in his ministry because, if he dies or is killed, he will be with the Lord, and that is preferable to him. An important point for believers is that there is an intermediate state in which believers after death will be spiritually with Jesus and see him while they wait to be reunited with their body in the resurrection.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that the Holy Spirit will bring confidence in the resurrection so that you wouldn’t fear inviting people.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

This ought to stop most of us in our tracks. We have often heard people say, “God can’t be more pleased with you than he is right now.” This obviously does not square with Paul’s saying that, no matter what situation he’s in, he makes it his goal to please God. But we have to understand what he means. For Paul, salvation is by grace through faith. Through faith we have a fully accepted position in God’s family. But just like a healthy, earthly family, children who love their father love bringing him pleasure. They don’t try to please him so that he will actually consider them his children, that status cannot change. But Paul then drops a bombshell: both Christians and non-Christians will appear before Christ’s judgment seat to receive back for what they did—good or evil. Trying to explain what exactly this looks like would only be speculation. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 might be the closest picture of what this looks like.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that God would grow our love for him so that it compels us to please him by inviting people to hear his gospel on Easter.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.

This isn't quite how we think. Paul is continuing his thought here: we know that we must all appear before Christ at judgment and that we will give an account for how we lived our lives. He connects this to knowing "the fear of the Lord." This fear leads him to persuade others of the truth of the gospel so that they might be saved. A Christian's fear of their Lord is still rooted in the understanding that their Lord is merciful and has died for their sins. To those who are doubting Paul's ministry, he says that the apostles and their ministry is known to God as being faithful. Paul hopes the Corinthians can see that too.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that the Holy Spirit would remind us that we have to give an account for how we spent our time in our bodies, so that we would be persistent in sharing with and inviting others.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:12-13

12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

It seems that Paul's opponents were judging Paul's ministry by what it looked like on the outside. Paul was constantly dealing with suffering, and through all the beatings he took, he probably didn't look all too impressive. But Paul is saying that, through this defense of his ministry, he is giving the Corinthians reason to answer his critics by showing that his heart is faithful to God. If he has ever said or did anything that seemed crazy or foolish to the Corinthians, it was for God. If he said or did anything that they could understand and agree with, it was for them.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray for a faithful heart, that as we go about inviting for the Easter service, we would do so not to look a certain way but because we love God.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

The ministry of the apostles is driven by the love of Christ because they have come to understand that Christ died for all and all have died with him. He was the representative substitute for all who are descended from Adam. The forgiveness earned in the cross by Christ's sacrifice is offered to all, and the reason he died for all is that those who find life in Christ through faith (see tomorrow), will turn away from their selfishness and live exclusively for their resurrected Lord. What Christ accomplished on the cross shows Christ's love for all people, and this love is the driving force of the apostle's ministry.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that we would see people like Paul, as humans who are loved by God and are offered salvation in the cross, that we may feel burdened for them to hear the gospel.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Paul is saying that he and the apostles don't look at anyone as people of the world normally do; the apostles see each person as someone who is offered salvation by Christ and has the potential for new life. Paul then declares the truth over those who have been united to Christ through faith, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." The people who trust what Christ did in the gospel have become people who will inherit the life of God's kingdom. The old person has died with Christ on the cross and the new person is raised with Christ in his resurrection. That's what it means to be "in Christ."

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Ask God to give you greater assurance that you are a new creation, that you would want to see others share in the new creation as well.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Both the new creation of humanity and the ministry to bring the message of reconciliation is given by God. This is shown in God's gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile his people to himself and that he also gave the Great Commission to his disciples to make disciples of all nations.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that God would prepare the hearts of those we aim to invite, so that they would be willing to come and hear the message of reconciliation.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

The apostles, and all Christians by extension, are representatives of the King. We are bringing the message of the kingdom to the world. That message is that God is offering people full reconciliation based on what Christ has done. This is what Paul and the apostles implore people to receive.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that we would take our commission as ambassadors of Christ seriously, having hearts that burn for people to be saved.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What God has done is put the sin of the world upon Christ, so that those who are united to him by faith can stand in the presence of God in the righteousness of God that only Christ deserves. Having been separated from his presence by the sin of Adam, we are now given the ability to return to God in full acceptance and assurance.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Thank God for his gift of the righteousness of Christ in the gospel.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Paul is saying, "We are working with God in his reconciliation of the world. Corinthians, I have brought to you the gospel of the grace of God. Don't ignore it; dive into it. If you are hearing this message, today is the day to accept it because, in you're hearing of the gospel message, God is at work offering his salvation to you now." Let us not accept God's grace in vain.

EASTER PRAYER POINT: Pray that we understand the urgency of the mission and that every day is a day to share the gospel and invite people to church for the purpose of seeing the lost saved and God glorified.

ⁱ Kostenberger, Andreas J., L. Scott Kellum, Charles L. Quarles The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament pg. 546.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. pg. 554