

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **2 CORINTHIANS LESSON 2**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Timothy Sparks and Ben Bailey.

### **Ben Bailey:**

“You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men” (2 Cor. 3:2). I’m Ben Bailey.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

And I’m Timothy Sparks. Welcome to our study of Second Corinthians. This study is brought to you by members of the churches of Christ. If you need help locating a congregation of the churches of Christ in your area, please contact us and we will be happy to help you find one. You can reach us through our website at [www.thegospelofchrist.com](http://www.thegospelofchrist.com). On our website, we also have streaming audio and video lessons, which you may download to assist you in your study of God’s Word. And, as always, we will be happy to send you a free copy of any of our lessons on DVD, VHS, or CDs. All of our lessons are available free of charge. We even pay the postage. E-mail us to let us know which lessons you would like, and we will be more than happy to send those to you.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that they are his “epistle,” or his “letter”—known and read by all men. There is an old poem that suggests, “You are writing a book, a chapter each day, by the deeds that you do, and the words that you say.” What is **your** book saying? What does **your** life reveal? What if you were the only “Bible” some people ever read? What would that message say to those around you? Would they Christ in you—the hope of glory (Col. 1:27)? Or would they see that your life is something evil? You will make an indelible impact as you influence people each and every day you live. It is important that we follow Christ’s instructions “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:16). But what other applications for our lives can be found in 2 Corinthians 3?

### **Ben Bailey:**

When we consider that we, by our example, are writing a letter of sorts, we need to realize that if we act solely by ourselves, it will not be the kind of letter it needs to be. However, with God’s help, we can make it the type of letter that allows people to see Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3:5, Paul wrote: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.” If we try to write that letter all by ourselves, and try to construct a biography that excludes God, it will end up being a very sad book to read. But if we rely on God, our life’s story will be something that can point people to Jesus and to the Cross. Too many times, we fail in life because we don’t bring God into the picture. When our life is difficult (and sometimes even when life is going well), we fail thank God for all the things He has done for us. We, in essence,

forget to include God in the goings-on in our life. We must remember that God is the One Who makes our life complete. Peter put it this way: “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3). Our life becomes “complete” as we study our Bibles and learn more about what God’s will is for us. It is not a “miraculous” process, but one in which we can engage every day. The Bible is “the perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25), and it is through it that we are made complete. In 2 Corinthians 3, doesn’t Paul make a contrast between the Old and the New Law—and which one will make us complete?

### **Timothy Sparks:**

Yes. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul makes the point that we no longer live under the Old Law (the Law of Moses). We now have “a greater glory”—the New Testament. He makes it clear that from the very moment Moses first began to receive the Old Law, its glory began to fade—began to pass away—in contrast to the New Law that would eventually arrive. The Old Testament is the New Testament **concealed**. And the New Testament is the Old Testament **revealed**. You’ll never find a person who really knows the New Testament, if he doesn’t first have a foundational understanding of the Old Testament. We learned from Romans 15:4: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we, through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.” God blessed us by decreeing, even before the foundations of the Earth were established, that the church would one day arrive (Eph 3:11). God “purposed beforehand” that Jesus would come to the Earth, die for the salvation of men’s souls, and reveal the New Covenant. Now, you and I live in the sunlight age of Christianity. We have been richly blessed by being able to see the prophecies about the church (and many other things) come true. We are the recipients of “so great a salvation.” But we must **accept** this free gift, and render obedience to the Gospel. We thus learn from 2 Corinthians 3 that we are no longer under the Old Law. Ben, tell us what else we can learn from 2 Corinthians 3 about the freedom we have under New Testament law.

### **Ben Bailey:**

Under the New Testament, we have freedoms that weren’t available under Old Testament law, which “bound” people to its precepts. In Galatians 3:10-11, Paul wrote: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law.” Peter confessed (Acts 15:5ff.) that it was **impossible** to keep the whole law. The law brought people under a curse; it put them in bondage. Yes, it was a good law, and it was a good pattern to follow, but Christianity presents a much more pleasant message that gives people freedom. Paul discusses this in Galatians 5, where he talks about the fact that we are no longer under bondage, but that we have been called to freedom, and as such, we must let Christ reign in our lives. The New Testament is truly a law that liberates us from so many harmful things. When a person follows the law of Jesus Christ, it frees him from sin, ungodliness, and ugliness in his life. Think of “the sin problem,” and how we are liberated from that. In Romans 3:23, we learn that **all** of us have sinned, and have fallen short of the glory of God. That sin, according to Isaiah 59:1-2, has separated us from God, because He is a just God Who cannot tolerate sin. But, “thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). Paul says in Romans 3:23 that the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is redemption in Christ Jesus. There are so many ways in which we are liberated when we follow the teachings of the Bible. It’s not just good for us **spiritually**; it’s also good for us **physically**. When we live as the Bible instructs us to live, without immorality and other problems, we don’t

have to worry about many of the diseases that come along with those things. Following the Gospel liberates us from so many problems that are in the world. I'm reminded of what Christ said in John 10:10: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." It's so true. Christ gives us the abundant life here—and in eternity.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

We learn from Titus 1:2 that we are "in hope of eternal life, which God, Who cannot lie, promised before time began." However, we must be careful, lest we fall into the trap of thinking that God's grace gives us a license to sin. Paul said in Romans 5:20: "Where sin abounded, grace abounded even more." In a world where Satan frequently rules and reigns, God's grace "superabounded" in order to provide a way of escape from the bondage of sin. Some in Corinth apparently thought that if grace "superabounded," then the more they sinned, the more grace they would experience. Paul addressed that very concept in Romans 6:1: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" His answer was: **absolutely not!** God's grace is not a license to sin. God's grace, along with the freedom it allows us in Christ, provides us with freedom from sin. God empowers us with the Gospel. Paul says: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). The Gospel is God's *dunamis*—"dynamite"—to blast sin out of a person's life and to replace it with righteousness. The Gospel serves as a lifeline to save people from the depths of sin. Why, then, would anyone want to go back and suggest that they are still under the Old Law? Paul, in Colossians 2:14, made it clear that Christ "wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." We are no longer under the Old Law—something for which we should be grateful. Rather, we are under the New Law—and everyone is amenable to what is written in it.

### **Ben Bailey:**

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul ventures into a discussion of how the Gospel of Christ brings light and love into our lives. We know from 1 John 4:8 that "God is light." When we bring the Gospel into our lives, and live as God wants us to live, we can no longer be harmed, in a spiritual sense, by the trials and tribulations that afflict those in the world. Paul no longer emphasizes just the fact that we are not under the Old Law, but instead discusses the beauty of the Gospel of Christ. According to Romans 1:16, it "the power of God unto salvation." Nothing can save my soul **but** the Gospel of Christ. As James said, we need to "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save our souls" (Jas. 1:21). The Bible, and the Bible only, can make Christians, and Christians only. We should have the same attitude as the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who wrote: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16). How do **you** feel about God's Word? Has that Word set up its own abiding place in your heart? Have you made it the standard for your life? Until you do, your life cannot be what God wants it to be. Timothy, explain to us how it is that, although some of these Corinthians had problems, those problems didn't overtake them—but instead, **they** overcame **their problems**.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

In an earlier discussion, Paul said that we as Christians are an "epistle," a "letter," to others. Now, he concentrates on the fact that if the Gospel within us is hidden, then it is hid-

den from those who need it most—those who are lost. You are “good news” to others if you are living the “good news” of the Gospel. Then, your life is the example it ought to be. But, with some, the “god of this world” has blinded their eyes so that they will not see the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ. Christ is the very image of God. But if as Christians “hide” the Gospel through out bad example, we have affected others adversely, and have failed to show unto them the Gospel. On the other hand, if we live faithfully, even when we are persecuted and “cast down,” we will not be snuffed out. Jeremiah came to a point (Jer. 20:9) in his life where he felt that he would no longer be able to speak or teach, yet he said that the word “burned in his bones” so that he could not help himself—he **had** to speak out on God’s behalf. The world may try to mold us into its own image, and thereby cause us to conform, but if we hold fast to God’s teaching, it will not matter. We will remain truly faithful to God and His Word. Paul addressed this very concept in Ephesians 6: when he wrote: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” For the faithful Christian, the message of 2 Corinthians 4 is that we may be crushed, but we are not consumed. We may be beaten down, but we are not destroyed. We are always trying to show forth in our lives the light of Christ.

### **Ben Bailey:**

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul says that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.” Where is **your** power? Where do you look for strength? Do you depend merely on “self”? One of the blessings in being a child of God is that we do not have to put our confidence in “earthen vessels”—clay bodies that will ultimately perish. Rather, we can put our eternal hope in the living God. If we are trusting in the ideas of men to save us, we will utterly fail. But if we look to God as the source of our strength, then we cannot help but be victorious in the end. I’m reminded of the words of Paul in Philippians 4:13 when he said: “I can do **all things** through Christ, Who strengthens me.” By himself, Paul could not conquer as he wanted to, but with Jesus, he could overcome. This teaches us that we, too, must overcome through Christ, just as Revelation 2:10 teaches: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give unto you the crown of life.” The battle has already been fought. It’s over. Jesus battled the devil—and won! If we want to be on the winning side, then we must align ourselves with Jesus Christ. He has conquered the devil. He has conquered death. He has brought eternal life to reality for those who obey the Gospel. But if we are still aligning ourselves with the ideas of men, then we have placed our hope in earthen vessels, which will ultimately fail. This is one of the overriding themes of the Bible.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

The way to have a successful life is to follow the only book that came from Heaven, and that can lead us back to Heaven—the Bible. We frequently sing a song, “Into our hands the Gospel is given, into our hands is given the light; haste, let us carry God’s precious message, guiding the erring back to the light. Swiftly we are turning life’s daily pages, swiftly the hours are turning to years. How are we using God’s precious message? Shall we reap glory, shall we reap tears?” The Gospel is God’s power to save. We have it within our grasp. What are we **doing** with it? If we are hiding it, then we are hiding from people their only means of salvation. We sing so many songs that reflect upon the necessity and the urgency of our spreading the Gospel. One of those songs—based on the passage in

Acts 16 about the Macedonians needing the Gospel—is “Send the Light.” The text of 2 Corinthians 4:7 stresses the value of that Gospel, as it has been placed into our hands. The question then arises: “What are **we** doing with this priceless possession—the Gospel of Christ?” Sometimes people are enamored with things like valuable antiques or other goods. But Jesus asked in Mark 8:36-37: “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Even if you were to become the wealthiest person on Earth, what would you have gained—if you ended up losing your own soul? Only when we put things into their proper perspective will we then learn how to live God’s Word in order to help others do the same.

### **Ben Bailey:**

In 2 Corinthians 4:13, Paul, referring back to Psalm 116:10, made this statement: “And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak.” Our message today is the same as Paul’s. We believe in Jesus as Lord. We believe that He is the only Son of God, that He came to Earth to live a sinless, perfect life, and that He died for our sins. We speak that message because we **must**. The Lord has far too many “silent partners.” If we **really** believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and if we **really** believe that most people in the world are going down a path that will lead them to an eternity in Hell, then we **must** speak about the Christ. That is what prompts us to say the things we say in these broadcasts. We love your soul. We do not say what we say out of financial considerations. Rather, we say these things because we want people to become faithful children of God.

Friend, have you become a Christian? The Bible says in Ephesians 3:4 that when you read God’s holy will, you can understand it. We know from Scripture that God is not the Author of confusion. So what must a person do to become a Christian? Romans 10:17 tells us that we first must **hear** the Word of God, and that is the Word of God that produces faith. Then, we must **believe** that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus said in John 8:24: “Unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins.” So, we must believe. But according to James 2:24, belief alone isn’t enough. We must combine our belief with other biblical teaching as well. We also must **repent**. Jesus said in Luke 13:3: “Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.” Repenting means that we change our will and change our ways. When we repent, we become a different person. Then, we learn in Romans 10:9-10 that we must **confess** with our mouth that Jesus is God’s Son. Jesus emphasized this fact in Matthew 10:32-33. But we also must **be baptized** for the remission of our sins. Jesus said: “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

### **Timothy Sparks:**

So many people seem to miss the importance of baptism. But baptism is what puts us “into Christ.” Once we are in Christ, we then must be “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10). Once again, we want to thank you for joining us in our broadcast. We hope you will continue to study with us as we endeavor to uncover more of “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

### **Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 2 CORINTHIANS LESSON 2

1. Paul emphasized to the Christians in Corinth that they were an “epistle.” What did he mean by that?
2. In 2 Corinthians 3:5, Paul explained that Christians are not “sufficient unto themselves,” but instead have their sufficiency “from God.” Why is that the case?
3. According to Romans 15:4, what was one of the purposes behind God’s providing us with the text of the Old Testament?
4. According to 2 Corinthians 3, we today are no longer under the Old Law. What happened to the Old Law? Why are we no longer bound by it? Incorporate Colossians 2:14 into your answer.
5. James 1:25 says that we now live under “the perfect law of liberty.” What is that law? What is “perfect” about it?
6. The Old Law was said to have brought to people, in at least some fashion, “a curse.” Why was that the case?
7. Discuss, in light of Romans 3:23 and 6:23, how the New Law brings freedom.
8. If God’s grace is able to cover our infractions of His law, should we have any real concerns about our sins? Work into your response Romans 5:20 and 6:1.
9. The Gospel, according to Paul’s discussion in 2 Corinthians 4, brings light and love to our lives. How, exactly, does it do that?
10. How is the Gospel “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16)?
11. In 2 Corinthians 4:1, Paul said that Christians should not “lose heart.” Why not?
12. When Paul observed that he “believes, and therefore speaks” the Gospel, what was the point he was trying to get across to **all** Christians?
13. According to 2 Corinthians 4:7, the Gospel has been placed into “earthen vessels.” Explain what that means.