

2 Corinthians

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, ... the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Paul and His Letters* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don't miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church's criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God's unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church's living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit's guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you'll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§] And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||} and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵ that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven ... earth ... under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God's g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

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Prepare

Read the Introduction to 2 Corinthians, paying particular attention to the *Purpose* and *Themes and Characteristics* of the book. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of 2 Corinthians to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of 2 Corinthians, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on 2 Corinthians as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:15.** What is the “double pleasure” referred to in this verse? In other words, how many visits to Corinth did Paul plan to make? Why did he change those plans?
2. **1:17.** What charge is Paul arguing against here? Why does Paul say he was not fluctuating between Yes and No? What was he trying to avoid?
3. **Word Study: Amen (1:20).** What is the Hebrew origin of the word *Amen*? How is it used in the OT? In what context is it used in the NT? What does it express there? Why is Christ called the “Amen”? How does Jesus himself use this expression?
4. **1:22.** With what are Christians inwardly “stamped”? What did a seal stand for in ancient times? What does Paul’s teaching point to in this context, and what is its importance for the Christian? What does the term *guarantee* mean in this passage?

For application

1. **1:3–4.** When did you last bless God for the comfort you have received from him? What was the nature of the comfort and of the affliction that preceded it? Have you been able to use this comfort to help others who are suffering in a similar way?
2. **1:8–11.** How do you pray in time of suffering? Has suffering affected your trust in God? Can you apply v. 9 to your own experience?
3. **1:17–20.** How often do you find that your faith vacillates between Yes and No—between on and off, hot and cold, zealous and slothful? What tends to make you swing in one direction or the other? Have you found ways to strengthen your faith, so that it increasingly gravitates toward Yes?
4. **1:22.** Have you ever been aware that the Spirit of God has actually been given to you? Of what is the Spirit a guarantee?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:3.** What may have been the letter to which Paul is referring in this verse? How do some scholars think this correspondence has been preserved, and how certain is their opinion?
2. **2:7.** Why does Paul not want remedial punishment for sinners to be unduly prolonged or excessively harsh? Where else in 2 Cor does Paul warn about the devil’s schemes?
3. **Word Study: Leads Us in Triumph (2:14).** To what Roman practice is this expression linked? What were the Roman ceremonies intended to do? How does Paul adapt this traditional notion?
4. **2:14–16.** How are the terms *aroma* and *fragrance* used in the first five books of the OT? How does Sirach use the terms? How does Paul interpret these understandings in the light of the New Covenant?

For application

1. **2:1–4.** How do you tend to administer correction to those under you? How do those you correct receive it? Does your manner of delivering correction communicate love or respect for those you must discipline? How is this achieved?
2. **2:5–7.** If the corrections you deliver are ever done publicly (for example, before the family or a work group), how do you ensure that the group members maintain respect for those being corrected?
3. **2:15.** What do you think a relationship would be like that communicates “the fragrance of Christ” to those involved in it? Which of your Christian relationships would you characterize as “aromatic” of Christ? If some are not spiritually “fragrant”, what do you think is causing the bad odor?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:1.** Why were written referrals used for traveling missionaries? How did Paul’s opponents apparently use these letters? Why did Paul feel that he did not need such letters?

2. **3:6.** How has tradition understood Paul's contrast between the letter and the Spirit? What are the benefits of life in the Spirit?
3. **3:7.** Why did Moses hide his face after speaking directly with the Lord on Mt. Sinai? What was he veiling from the eyes of the Israelites?
4. **3:18.** Whose image is being formed in us by the Spirit? What real life experiences, now and in the future, are part of this transformation?

For application

1. **3:5.** To what extent do you depend on Christ to accomplish *anything* in the Christian life? Is your answer a matter of "correct theology" or of personal experience? If the latter, what experience drove the point home to you?
2. **3:6b.** At what point did your obedience to the gospel stop being mainly a matter of keeping the Church's rules and start being a matter of love for God?
3. **3:15–16.** How would you apply these verses to your own reading of Scripture? For example, what do you think is happening when a Scripture passage you have read a dozen times suddenly springs to life and has some personal meaning to you?
4. **3:18.** How is it possible for you to "become what you behold"? If you continually feed your gaze with violent or erotic images, what kind of person are you likely to become? Similarly, what will you begin to look like if you spend a lot of time with God?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:6.** How does Paul view conversion? How is conversion like the dawn of history? What does the prophet Isaiah have to say about the role of light? What was Paul's own experience of the light of Christ?
2. **4:7.** What does the difference between earthenware and treasure point to in this passage? What cultic expression from the OT is Paul using here? What do we carry in our suffering bodies, then?
3. **4:8–11.** How does the grace of apostleship safeguard Paul? When do hardships conform us to Christ?
4. **4:17.** How is the Hebrew notion of "glory" conceptualized? What cannot compare with it?

For application

1. **4:4.** How does the "god of this world" blind people's minds? Even though the words of the gospel message are simple enough to understand in themselves, how do people with blinded minds fail to see their meaning?
2. **4:6.** One form of devotion is to meditate on the face of Christ in its various aspects—for example, on the face of Christ suffering. When have you meditated on this face? What has been the fruit of it for you? If you have never meditated on that face, try doing it now.
3. **4:13.** What is the connection between belief and speech? As an exercise, try reading the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed aloud to yourself, and after each statement say something like, "I, [state your name], really believe that!" What "spirit" results from an exercise like this?
4. **4:16–18.** In that same spirit, examine your current physical, emotional, and spiritual condition. Then ask yourself what your future is likely to be in each of these areas. For example, in which area are you getting stronger or weaker? How do you know? Which of these areas needs the most work?

Chapter 5

For understanding

1. **Essay: Not Made with Hands.** What contrast does Scripture draw between the works of human hands and those made without hands? What four examples of the latter works does the essay provide?
2. **5:13.** What two interpretations may be given for the expression "beside ourselves" in this verse?
3. **5:17.** What does Baptism accomplish under the New Covenant? What happens to the old order of creation? How did the Prophets of Israel envision this renewal?
4. **5:21.** How is Jesus "made to be sin"? In the Greek OT, what is "sin" a shorthand word for? To what may the expression "the righteousness of God" in Paul's writings refer?

For application

1. **5:6–9.** How great is your love of your earthly life, and how great is your desire to be with the Lord in heaven? Which of these two loves is greater? Whom do you aim to please with the way you live your life?
2. **5:13–14.** What does it mean for the love of Christ to urge us on? How does that affect your attitudes and your behavior? How willing are you to be thought foolish by others when it comes to your faith?
3. **5:16–17.** How many “important people” do you know? What makes them important? According to what criteria do you consider someone important? For example, how might it affect your point of view to learn that someone socially unimportant is baptized? For that matter, what does it matter (practically speaking) that you yourself are a new creation?
4. **5:20.** Have you ever argued or fought with God? Who “won”? How might you and God need to be reconciled? How often do you work and/or pray for others to be reconciled with him?

Chapter 6

For understanding

1. **6:2.** In the passage from Isaiah that Paul cites, how does the prophet outline the mission of the Servant Messiah? How does the Messiah fulfill his mission? In this context, what is Paul stressing to the Corinthians?
2. **6:8.** If being treated as an impostor is the first of seven accusations hurled at Paul by his opponents, what are the other six (vv. 8–10)? How does he fight off these false charges?
3. **6:14.** What OT passage is Paul probably using as inspiration for his comments? What is the passage about? What is Paul trying to say by citing this passage—and what is he *not* saying?
4. **6:16–18.** What point is Paul making by linking together a chain of OT Scripture passages (see note)? With what events and efforts are these passages connected? With what was the sacredness of the Temple sanctuary incompatible? Why was the sacrificial system of the Temple established? How do these principles apply to believers?

For application

1. **6:2.** If modern people are advised by their culture to “seize the day”, then what day would Paul tell them to seize?
2. **6:3–8.** How willing would you be to have your reputation destroyed—or, short of that, to have your efforts and good intentions ignored or overlooked—in order for someone you do not know to come to salvation? How does your answer compare with Paul’s catalogue of sufferings that he willingly accepts?
3. **6:14.** How do you handle relationships with non-Christian relatives or friends that are dangerous to your faith? Why do you continue in them or pull away from them? For that matter, how might Paul’s advice not to be “mismatched with unbelievers” apply to relationships with *Christian* relatives or friends that are dangerous to your faith?
4. **6:17–18.** How “countercultural” is your practice of your faith? If Paul were still alive, would he recognize the difference between your conduct and that of the world around you and know which of the two was Christian?

Chapter 7

For understanding

1. **7:2.** Of what do Paul’s critics, by implication, accuse him? To what does he appeal in reply?
2. **7:5–16.** What function do these verses serve in the letter?
3. **7:8.** To which letter does Paul refer in this verse? Though he wrote it with great anxiety, what was he hoping to accomplish?
4. **7:10.** What is the contrast between “godly grief” and “worldly grief”? Who in the Gospels exemplifies each type?

For application

1. **7:1.** What do you understand “the fear of God” to mean? (Hint: Reflect on Is 6:1–7 or Prov 2:1–10.) How do you fear God? What does it mean to “make holiness perfect” in that kind of fear?
2. **7:6.** How would you recognize when someone is spiritually downcast? Is this condition the same as psychological depression, or are the two conditions different? How would you encourage someone who is spiritually downcast?
3. **7:10.** Refer to the note for this verse. What experiences have you had of the two types of grief? How would you describe the difference in your own experience?

4. **7:11–12.** What is your customary response to being corrected? Would you say that your response is like what Paul describes in these verses? What spiritual correction have you received, and how did you cooperate with or resist it?

Chapter 8

For understanding

1. **8:1—9:15.** What does this central section of the letter deal with? What was the practical and the symbolic meaning of the donation?
2. **8:3.** What is almsgiving? For what do both the OT and NT prescribe it? What does the Church do with the standard that Paul erects for almsgiving? What does the fifth precept of the Church state?
3. **8:15.** Why did the Exodus generation of Israel not need to store or hoard manna? What attitude would such behavior have displayed? In what way is Paul urging believers to imitate the Lord? What is meant to happen to the blessing of prosperity?
4. **8:19.** Who were commissioned to deliver the charitable donations to Jerusalem? To what did the Jewish theologian Philo refer, using the same expression as Paul does?

For application

1. **8:1–5.** In what kinds of charitable giving do you engage? What kinds do you avoid? In either case, what seems to be your principal motivation?
2. **8:10–11.** How do you feel when someone promises to help you but never delivers on the promise? What do you think others might say of the promises of help that you make?
3. **8:14–15.** What resource-sharing arrangements does your parish or faith community have with other parishes or communities? Have these arrangements worked to meet the needs of the groups involved?

Chapter 9

For understanding

1. **9:7.** From what source must charitable gifts flow? What are the OT references for this idea? What do reluctant givers show themselves to be?
2. **9:10.** According to the allusion to Is 55:10, what is an example of God's blessing? Of what are these natural blessings an image?
3. **9:15.** What does the "inexpressible gift" refer to here?

For application

1. **9:1–5.** If you have ever had the job of collecting a pledge or a debt, what approaches have you used to motivate others to pay the money they owe? When you make a pledge or incur a debt, what motivates you to pay it?
2. **9:6.** Though Paul is speaking of the need for generosity (the "sowing"), is he implying that one should be generous simply in order to get something back (the "reaping")? From a spiritual perspective, what kinds of "reaping" can the generous person expect?
3. **9:10.** How does generosity increase resources for even more generosity? In your experience, does giving what you have mean that you have less or that somehow you have more?
4. **9:11–15.** In what ways can generosity be an expression of thanksgiving to God?

Chapter 10

For understanding

1. **10:1—13:14.** How does Paul spend the final chapters of this letter? Who is his audience in this section? What does this shift of focus account for, then?
2. **10:8.** What kind of mission does Paul's apostleship represent? Why does he defend it so vigorously?
3. **10:13–18.** Of what does Paul accuse the false teachers? What role does Paul claim for himself, and why?
4. **10:17.** In the passage Paul quotes, what does Jeremiah warn Israel not to do? What should they do, rather?

For application

1. **10:7.** Do you have any areas of disagreement with Church authorities? If you regard yourself as a Christian in good standing, how willing are you to grant that those with whom you disagree are Christians in good standing as well?
2. **10:8.** Why does authority exist in the Church? What kind of authority does the Church have?
3. **10:10–11.** How often do you pray explicitly for your bishop and for others in authority in the Church?
4. **10:18.** How would you recognize when it is truly the Lord who is commending someone who does ministry in your parish or community?

Chapter 11

For understanding

1. **11:2.** As “father” of the Corinthians, what is Paul in charge of in their regard? For what is he preserving them?
2. **Word Study: Unskilled (11:6).** What are some of the meanings that the Greek word *idiōtēs* has in the NT? How does Paul use the word in 2 Cor in reference to himself? What comparison is Paul making between himself and Moses? Why would Moses consider himself an unlearned man?
3. **11:7–11.** Why would the Corinthians have felt insulted to have Paul refuse financial assistance from them? What reasons does Paul give for his decision not to seek it? In the end, what point is Paul making about his tireless labor among them?
4. **11:24.** To what does “forty lashes less one” refer? Why would the Jews not give the 40 lashes that the Torah prescribed? How many times had Paul endured this punishment?

For application

1. **11:3–4.** If a noted or popular preacher says something that sounds a little different from what you have been taught, how do you determine whether to believe it or not? How can you protect yourself from being “taken in” by plausible opinions of theologians who disagree in some respect with the Church’s teaching?
2. **11:13–15.** How often have you heard dissenters from authentic Catholic teaching present themselves as “servants of righteousness”? In Paul’s opinion, what kind of people are they really?
3. **11:21b–29.** Of what use are a professional’s credentials? If you were in a position of authority and faced an opponent with similar credentials to yours, which ones would you emphasize, and why?
4. **11:30.** What is the risk of emphasizing “credentials” that show your weakness? What is the potential benefit?

Chapter 12

For understanding

1. **12:2.** With what period of Paul’s life does this time reference correspond? What were the three levels of heaven in which Jewish tradition believed? What would Paul have glimpsed in the third heaven?
2. **Word Study: Paradise (12:3).** What is the Persian origin of the word *paradise*? Where in the OT does it appear? How does the NT sharpen this expectation?
3. **12:7.** What two interpretations might be given to Paul’s reference to a “thorn” in the flesh? Either way, why would God have allowed the suffering? How are Paul’s sufferings like those of another biblical character?
4. **12:9.** Why was Paul’s petition for relief denied? What does his experience show us about ourselves?

For application

1. **12:1–4.** If you receive special graces from God, such as visions, whom should you tell about them? What spiritual dangers lurk in telling your friends or acquaintances? What benefit do you enjoy by confiding in a prudent spiritual director?
2. **12:5–6.** If special spiritual experiences can be a danger as well as a blessing, what should you think of yourself if you never seem to have any special graces?
3. **12:7–10.** Why do you think God sometimes says No to your requests? How content are you to accept the fact that Christ’s grace—and not the answer you want—is enough for you?

Chapter 13

For understanding

1. **13:1.** How did Mosaic legislation seek to assure a fair criminal process? How does Paul apply this principle in a New Covenant context?
2. **13:4.** How does Paul use the Cross of Christ in referring to his own weakness? What point is he making?
3. **13:14.** Of what is this verse one of the earliest and clearest expressions in the NT? How has it been used in the Church?

For application

1. **13:3–4.** Meditate on the meaning of the crucifix. How much of a challenge to you is the crucifixion of the almighty Son of God? How does his weakness mean spiritual power for you?
2. **13:5.** How well—that is to say, how honestly and how rigorously—do you discipline yourself in your faith and your practice of it? Would your critics or your enemies agree with you?
3. **13:12.** Aside from the liturgical application of this verse, how welcoming to strangers and new members is your parish or community? How often do you associate with other parishioners outside of Mass?