

## Triumph in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:23–2:17)

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### Introduction

Spiritual leaders must live by specific standards.

1. Spiritual leaders are *accountable* to Christ, who is the Lord of faith (Hebrews 12:1, 2). Paul did not seek to “*lord it over [their] faith, but [to] work with [them] for [their] joy, for [them] stand firm in [their] faith*” (1:24). *Joy* is the deep and lasting satisfaction and happiness that is the fruit of the Spirit abiding in those who are in Christ and walk by faith.
2. Spiritual leaders are commissioned to *care* for Christ’s sheep (1 Peter 5:1–4). Thus, Paul ordered his actions in accord with the needs of the Corinthian believers. His joy was connected to their joy; he was confident that their faith was genuine and that Christ would work salvation in them. Nevertheless, Paul struggled in this time of trial, not knowing their condition but desiring for them to understand his love for them (v. 4).
3. Spiritual leaders are required to *rebuke* error, disobedience, and failure in those who purport to be Christ-followers. Leaders must be genuine and have clear consciences, being examples of sincere faith to do this. The objective of the rebuke was the repentance of the offender, leading to firm and secure faith, demonstrated in strength and ability, with joy of being right with God.

Thus, we note in the text before us, Paul’s example of ideal spiritual leadership, not owing to his personal ability. Rather, Paul confessed, “*Who is sufficient for these things*” (v. 16). He was a man of sincerity (without wax), commissioned by God and in the sight of God to speak in Christ (v. 17).

### I. Paul’s Tears (1:23–2:4)

1. In Chapter 2, Paul finished the defense of his decision not to make the visit he previously promised. It was not vacillation on his part but to spare both him and them from a painful encounter.

His critics in Corinth, Judaizers from Jerusalem, sought to discredit him in the church. Judaism of Paul’s day was not based on the Old Testament law but on a cobbled religion formulated in Babylon, a mix of legalism and mysticism. The Judaizers that Paul dealt with claimed to be Christian and followed Peter but were false teachers who sought to turn believers from Christ alone to a kind of faith plus works.

Paul referred to his previous letter (most likely 1 Corinthians). The purpose for that letter was that the church should get some matters straightened out before he visited them.

2. Paul’s tears were due to the pain mentioned in 2:4. This letter was to let them know of his great distress and anguish due to the uncertainty of their response. If they were genuine believers, they would get things right. Paul used a series of *reasons* for his actions, one following the other.

The men whom God commissions to shepherd His people will speak things that may seem to hurt and offend. This is necessary for believers to face the issues of the flesh that might be overlooked due to the deceitfulness of the heart. Growth is grace is a move from the world to a higher spiritual plane (Galatians 6:16; Romans 6:6).

### II. The Repentant Transgressor (vv. 5–11)

1. Paul then turned his attention to the matter of forgiveness. The situation he referred to is recorded in 1 Corinthians 5. A member of the church had committed an open sexual sin, which even the pagans would not tolerate. The church response was to boast about their toleration. They ought to have re-

buked the sin and disciplined this man (1 Corinthians 5:5). Paul had made it very clear that “*the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). Churches must purge the evil among them (1 Corinthians 5:13). Here was a test. Would the church obey? Sadly, modern Christianity knows very little about church discipline and is thus anemic. Many preachers are like those Paul described as “*peddlers of God’s word*” (v. 17). They live by what they hope to gain by their work; they are hucksters, self-seeking, not serving the Lord or His people.

2. The response needed by the Corinthians to the man’s sin was to obey God for both the purity of the church and for the salvation of the sinner. The church acted as Paul hoped, and the result was that the man repented. However, the church left it there.
3. This was also a matter of spiritual warfare. Satan loves conflict and division. The Lord’s servants must not be outwitted by Satan. “*We are not ignorant of his designs [or devices]*” (v 11).

### **III. Triumph in Christ (vv. 12–17)**

1. Paul described his unrest in not getting the report of Titus, whom he had sent to the Corinthian church to see how they received his letter. This confession of his anxiety over the matter is quite revealing. Not finding Titus in Troas, he left for Philippi Macedonia. Paul described his meeting with Titus in Chapter 7:7:6, 7.
2. Paul’s confidence in the church was restored by Titus’ report, which is assumed by the following verses (vv. 14–17). The success of ministry does not lie with the preacher but with God who calls and equips him for service. The term *triumph* is found only twice in the NT, here and Colossians 2:13–16. *Triumph* means, as used in Colossians, that God “triumphs over us” in Christ. Paul regarded himself as a trophy of God’s victorious power over his sinful and rebellious heart. The Conqueror was leading His defeated foe in a victory procession, due to Christ’s power to subdue and to save.

### **Lessons**

1. Have you been conquered by the triumphant King? Those whom Christ leads in this procession to be His servants are those through whom He “*spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere*” (v. 14). We are to be “*the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing*” (v. 15). We do this by sharing the gospel with others. Those who receive the gospel will be saved, but those who reject it will perish. This is accomplished through us in Christ. We, as Paul confessed, are not sufficient for these things. Only Christ in us is sufficient.
2. Satan cannot gain advantage over those who are in Christ. He may try. He may even be somewhat successful in the short term, but, as we read in Colossians, “*He [the crucified Lord] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*” Thus, Paul assures us, “*We are not ignorant of his [Satan’s] designs*” (v 11). Believers need not fear the devil but only beware of him. As Peter instructs, “*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith*” (I Peter 5:8, 9). We need not fear him.
3. To serve the Lord, we cannot harbor sin and self. Self must die, and Christ must reign as Lord of all. We are to obey Him sincerely and humbly as He reveals Himself to us in the Word of God. “*We are not [to be], like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we [are to] speak in Christ*” (v. 17).