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2 Corinthians and Work

Theology of Work Project

Joel R. White

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CONTRIBUTOR/S:

Joel R. White

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Introduction to 2 Corinthians

If 1 Corinthians gives us unparalleled insight into the everyday life of a New Testament church (see "[1 Corinthians and Work](http://www.theologyofwork.org)" at www.theologyofwork.org), 2 Corinthians offers us a unique glimpse into the heart and soul of the apostle whose work founded and built that church. We see Paul at work, teaching and exemplifying transparency, joy, good relationships, sincerity, reputation, service, humility, leadership, performance and accountability, reconciliation, working with nonbelievers, encouragement, generosity, timely fulfillment of obligations, and the proper use of wealth.

These workplace topics arose because of the daily struggles and opportunities Paul encountered in his own work as an apostle. During the period leading up to the composition of 2 Corinthians, Paul faced any number of "disputes without and fears within," as he describes them (2 Cor. 7:5). These clearly left their mark on him and the result is a letter like no other in the New Testament, intensely personal, exhibiting a full range of emotions, from anguish and agitation to exuberance and confidence. As a result of this adversity, Paul became a more effective leader and worker. Anyone who wants to learn how to be more effective in his/her work—and who is willing to trust God for the ability to do so—will find a very practical model in Paul and his teachings in 2 Corinthians.

Paul's Interactions with the Church in Corinth (2 Corinthians)

In the introduction to 1 Corinthians we noted that Paul established the church of Corinth during his first sojourn there (winter 49/50 - summer 51 AD). Later he wrote one letter to the Corinthian church that no longer exists (it is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9) and one letter that does—our 1 Corinthians. He also visited the church three times (2 Cor. 12:14, 13:1). We know from Romans 16:1 that Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans during one of his stays in Corinth.

Nonetheless, Paul's relationship with the church in Corinth was strained. At one point he wrote them what has come to be known as the "severe letter"—another one of Paul's letters that we do not possess [1]—that apparently was quite harsh (see 2 Cor. 2:4). He sent it off to the Corinthians with Titus in the hope that it would bring about a change of heart among his antagonists in Corinth. The unresolved conflict with the church in Corinth made Paul restless as he waited to hear back from them (2 Cor.

1:12-13). When Titus finally arrived in the autumn of 55 AD he brought good news from Corinth. Paul's severe letter had, in fact, proven to be remarkably beneficial. The believers in Corinth who had been the cause of so much sorrow were truly grieved about the rupture in their relationship with Paul, and their sorrow had led to repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-16).

In response to that news, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, or more precisely the first seven chapters, to express his joy and gratitude both to God and to the Corinthians for the restored relationship between them. In these chapters he models the kind of transparency, joy, attention to relationships, integrity, reputation, service, dependence on God, ethical conduct, character, and encouragement that God calls all Christians to embody. Following this, in chapters eight and nine, he turns to the topics of generosity and timely fulfillment of obligations as he exhorts the Corinthians to contribute to the relief of Christians in Jerusalem, as they had promised to do. In this section Paul highlights how our needs are met by God's generosity, not only so we lack nothing we need, but also so we have plenty to share with others. In chapters 10-13 he describes the marks of godly leadership, apparently in response to disturbing news he received about so-called "super apostles" who were leading some of the Corinthian church astray. Although we are not concerned here with church leadership per se, Paul's words in this section are directly applicable to all workplaces.

Thank God for Relationships (2 Corinthians 1:1-11)

Second Corinthians begins with Paul's sincere thanks for the deep relationship he has with the Corinthians. They are so closely knit together that whatever happens to one, it is as if it happened to all. He writes, "If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation" (2 Cor. 1:6). "As you share in our sufferings, so you also share in our consolation" (2 Cor. 1:7). Paul's description of the relationship sounds almost like a marriage. Given the very strained relationship between Paul and the church that comes into view during the letter, this intimacy may be surprising. How could people with huge disagreements, disappointments and even anger at each other say things like, "our hope for you is unshaken" (2 Cor. 1:7)?

The answer is that good relationships do not arise from mutual agreement but mutual respect in the pursuit of a common goal. This is a crucial point for our lives at work. We generally do not choose our coworkers, just as the Corinthians did not choose Paul to be their apostle and Paul did not choose those God would lead to faith. Our relationships at work are not based on mutual attraction but on the need to work together to accomplish our common tasks. This is true whether our work is to plant churches, to manufacture auto parts, to process insurance government forms, to teach at a university, or any other vocation. The more difficult things are, the more important good relationships become.

How do we build good relationships at work? In a sense, the rest of 2 Corinthians is an exploration of

various means of building good working relationships—transparency, integrity, accountability, generosity, etc. We will discuss all of them in this context. But Paul makes it clear that we cannot achieve good relationships through skills and methods alone. What we need above all is God’s help. For this reason, praying for each other is the cornerstone of good relationships. “Join in helping us by prayers,” Paul asks and then speaks of, “the blessing granted to us through the prayers of many” (2 Cor. 1:11).

How deeply do we invest in relationships with the people we work among? The answer might be measured by the extent to which we pray for them. Do we care enough about them to pray for them? Do we pray for their specific needs and concerns? Do we bother to learn enough about their lives so that we *can* pray for them in concrete ways? Do we open our own lives enough so that others can pray for us? Do we ever ask the people in our workplaces whether we can pray for them or them for us? They may not share our faith, but people almost always appreciate an authentic offer to pray for them or a request to pray (or hope) for us.

Transparency (2 Corinthians 1:12-23)

As Paul moves into the body of his second letter to the Corinthians, he addresses the complaint that he had not been open and honest with the Corinthians. Although he promised to visit Corinth again, Paul had backed out twice. Was Paul being insincere or speaking out of both sides of his mouth? Was he maneuvering behind the scenes to get his way behind others’ backs? Paul addresses these questions in 2 Corinthians 1:12-14. He is proud that his behavior among the Corinthians has been transparent at all times. His actions were not the machinations of what he calls “fleshly wisdom” (2 Cor. 1:12). He cancelled his visits, not to gain an advantage for himself or save face, but because he did not want to shame or rebuke the Corinthians again. Therefore he delayed coming back to Corinth in the hope that, when he did come, he could bring joy rather than recrimination and reproof (2 Cor. 1:23-24).

Though Paul’s integrity had been questioned, he knew that because of his history of transparency with them, they would continue to trust him. “We have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity,” he reminds them (2 Cor. 1:12). Because they have seen him in action they know that he says what he means without vacillating (2 Cor. 1:17-20). This makes him sure they, “will understand until the end” (2 Cor. 1:1-13), once they know all the factors he has had to consider. His proof of their trust is that even without knowing everything, Paul tells them, “you have already understood us in part” (2 Cor. 1:13).

In our work today, are we transparent enough so that people have a reason to trust us? On a daily basis, every person, company and organization faces temptations to hide the truth. Are we obscuring our motivations in order to falsely gain trust from a customer or a rival? Are we making decisions in secret

as a way of avoiding accountability or hiding factors that others would object to? Are we pretending to support a coworker in his or her presence, but speaking derisively behind his or her back? Paul's example shows us that these actions are wrong. Moreover, whatever brief advantage we might gain from them is more than lost in the long term because our coworkers learn not to trust us. And if our coworkers cannot trust us, can God?

This doesn't mean, of course, that we always reveal all the information we have. There are confidences, personal and organizational, that cannot be broken. Not everyone needs to be privy to all information. At times the honest answer may be, "I can't answer that question because I have a duty of privacy to someone else." But we shouldn't use confidentiality as an excuse to prevaricate, to gain an edge on others, or to portray ourselves in a falsely positive light. If and when questions surface about our motives, a solid track record of openness and reliability will be the best antidote for misplaced doubts.

Transparency is so important to Paul's work with the Corinthians that he returns to the theme throughout the letter. "We refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves" (2 Cor. 4:2). "We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you" (2 Cor. 6:11).

Working for the Joy of Others (2 Corinthians 1:24)

Joy is the next means of building relationships that Paul discusses. "I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith" (2 Cor. 1:24). Joy explains why Paul was such an effective leader and why the people associated with him became strong and reliable coworkers. Even though he was an apostle with God-given authority, Paul's aim was the joy of working together, not the pride of forcing others to do his bidding. We hear an echo of Jesus' words to his disciples when they were arguing about who among them was the greatest:

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. (Luke 22:25-26)

The essence of Christian work, Paul maintains, is nothing less than working alongside others to help them attain greater joy.

What would our workplaces look like if one of our prime directives were bringing joy?^[2] Joy in this sense is not the fleeting feeling of happiness but the deep delight of working in accordance with God's design. What's to stop you from making it your goal to strive for a deep sense of mutual satisfaction in your dealings with coworkers and clients?

The Priority of Relationships (2 Corinthians 2:12-16)

Another means to healthy interactions at work is simply taking the time and effort to develop and invest in relationships. Having left Ephesus, Paul went to Troas, a port city in the northwest corner of Asia Minor, where he expected Titus to arrive from his visit to Corinth (see "[Introduction](#)" for details). While Paul was there he went about his missionary work with his usual vigor, and God blessed his efforts. But in spite of a promising beginning in a city of great strategic importance,^[3] Paul cut short his work in Troas because, as he puts it, "My mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there" (2 Cor. 2:13). He simply could not attend to his work, his very passion, because of the anguish he felt over his strained relationship with the Corinthian believers. So he left for Macedonia in the hope of finding Titus there.

Two things are striking about this passage. First, Paul places significant value on his relationships with other believers. He cannot remain aloof and unburdened when these relationships are in disrepair. We cannot say with absolute certainty that he was familiar with Jesus' teaching about leaving one's gift at the altar and being reconciled to one's brother (Matthew 5:23-24), but he clearly understood the principle. Paul is eager to see things patched up, and he invests a great deal of energy and prayer in pursuing that end. Second, Paul places a high priority on bringing about reconciliation, even if it causes significant delay in his work schedule. He does not try to convince himself that he has a great opportunity for ministry that will not come around again, and that therefore he can't be bothered with the Corinthians and their momentary needs. Repairing the rupture in his relationship with them takes precedence.

The lesson for us is obvious. Relationships matter. Clearly, we cannot always drop what we're doing at a moment's notice and attend to strained relationships. But no matter what our task, relationships *are* our business. Tasks are important. Relationships are important. So, in the spirit of Matt. 5:23-24, when we learn—or even suspect—that a relationship has been strained or broken in the course of our work, we do well to ask ourselves which is more pressing at the moment, the completion of the task or the restoration of a relationship. The answer may vary, depending on circumstances. If the task is big enough, or the strain in relationship serious enough, we do well not only to ask which is more pressing but also to seek counsel from a respected brother or sister.

Sincerity (2 Corinthians 2:17)

As in 2 Corinthians 1:12, Paul again addresses lingering questions about his delay in visiting Corinth. The Corinthians seem offended because he did not initially accept financial support from the church in Corinth. His response is that supporting himself was a matter of sincerity. Could people trust that he

really believed what he was preaching, or was he doing it just to make money, like the “peddlers of God’s word” (2 Cor. 2:17) who could be found in any Roman city? It appears that he did not want to be lumped together with the philosophers and rhetoricians of his day who charged hefty fees for their speeches.^[4] Instead he and his coworkers were “persons of sincerity.” They were quite clearly not going from place to place preaching the Gospel in order to get rich, but understood themselves as individuals who were sent by God and answered to God.

This reminds us that motivation is not only a private matter, especially when it comes to money. The way we handle money shines like a laser pointer on the question of our sincerity as Christians. People want to see whether we handle money in accordance with our high principles or ditch our principles when there’s money to be made. Are we lax with our expense accounts? Do we hide income under the table? Do we engage in dubious tax shelters? Do we push for raises, commissions, and bonuses at the expense of others? Do we take financial advantage of people in difficult circumstances? Do we twist contracts to gain a disproportionate financial gain? The question is not only whether we can justify ourselves, but whether those around us can recognize that our actions are consistent with Christian beliefs. If not, we bring dishonor to ourselves and to the name of Christ.

A Genuine Reputation (2 Corinthians 3)

Paul begins this section of 2 Corinthians with two rhetorical questions, both of which expect a negative answer.^[5] “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we?” (2 Cor. 3:1). Paul—their old friend—wryly asks whether he needs the letters of introduction or commendation that others who had presented themselves to the church apparently possessed. Such letters were common in the ancient world, and generally it was necessary to take them with a grain of salt. The Roman statesman Cicero wrote scores of them, for instance, making lavish use of the stereotypical language of praise that the genre demanded. Recipients became so jaded, however, that sometimes he felt it necessary to write a second letter so that the recipients would know whether to take the first letter seriously.^[6] Letters of commendation, in other words, were often not worth the papyrus they were written on.

Paul had no need of them in any case. The Corinthian believers knew him intimately. The only letter of recommendation he required was already written on their hearts (2 Cor. 3:3). Their very existence as a church as well as their individual conversions in response to Paul’s preaching was all the commendation Paul needed or wanted concerning his apostleship. They could see the fruit of Paul’s labor, which left no doubt that he was an apostle sent by God. Further, Paul insists, he is not claiming competence in his own strength. “Our competence is from God,” (2 Cor. 3:5) he writes. The question is not whether Paul has piled up credentials and recommendations, but whether his work is a contribution for the kingdom of God.

How do we build our reputations today? In the US, many young people choose their activities based not on how they can best contribute to their communities, or even on what they actually enjoy, but upon how the activities will look on a university or graduate school application. This can continue during our working lives, with every job assignment, professional affiliation, dinner party and social event calculated to associate us with prestigious people and institutions. Paul chose his activities based on how he could best serve the people he loved. Following his lead, we would work so as to leave solid evidence of jobs well done, of lasting results, and of people whose lives have been impacted for the better.

Leading and Serving (2 Corinthians 4)

Second Corinthians chapter 4 brings together themes that are closely related in Paul's work—transparency, humility, weakness, leadership and service. Because we are seeing Paul at work in a real-life situation, the themes are entangled as Paul tells the story. But we will try to discuss the themes one at a time in order to explore each one as clearly as possible.

Transparency and Humility (2 Corinthians 4)

Paul returns to the theme of transparency in chapter 4, as we noted in our discussion of [2 Corinthians 1:12-23](#). This time he emphasizes the importance of humility for maintaining transparency. If we are going to let everyone see the reality of our life and work, we had better be prepared to be humbled.

Naturally, it would much easier to be transparent with people if we had nothing to hide. Paul himself says, "We have renounced the shameful things that one hides" (2 Cor. 4:2). But transparency requires that we remain open, even if we have engaged in conduct that is not commendable. For the truth is, we are all susceptible to errors of intention and execution. "We have this treasure in clay jars," Paul reminds us (2 Cor. 4:7), alluding to the typical household vessels of his day which were made of common clay and easily breakable. Anyone who visits the remains of the Ancient Near East can testify to the shards of these vessels lying scattered everywhere. Paul reinforces this idea later by recounting that God gave him a "thorn in the flesh" in order to restrain his pride (2 Cor. 12:7).

Maintaining transparency when we know our own weaknesses requires humility and especially the willingness to offer a genuine apology. Many apologies by public figures sound more like thinly-veiled justifications than actual apologies. This may be because, if we depend on ourselves as the source of our confidence, to apologize would be to risk our ability to carry on. But Paul's confidence is not in his own rightness or ability, but in his dependence on the power of God. "We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). If we too acknowledged that the good things we accomplish are not a reflection on us, but on our Lord, then maybe we could have the courage to admit our mistakes and look to God to put us

back on track again. At the very least, we could stop feeling like we have to maintain our image at all costs, including the cost of deceiving others.

Weakness as the Source of Strength (2 Corinthians 4)

[The relational fallout of job loss and working through the grieving process together \(Click to listen\)](#)

Our weakness is not just a challenge to our transparency, however. It is actually the source of our true abilities. Enduring suffering is not an unfortunate side effect experienced in some circumstances; it is the actual means of bringing about genuine accomplishment. Just as the power of Jesus' resurrection came about *because* of his crucifixion,^[7] so the apostles' fortitude in the midst of adversity testifies to the fact that the same power is at work in them.

In our culture, no less than in Corinth, we project strength and invincibility because we feel they are necessary to climb the ladder of success. We try to convince people that we are stronger, smarter, and more competent than we really are. Paul's message of vulnerability may sound very challenging to us. Is it apparent in the way that you go about your work that the strength and vitality you project is not your own, but rather God's strength on display in your weakness? When you receive a compliment do you allow it to add to your aura of brilliance? Or do you recount the ways God—perhaps working through other people—made it possible for you to exceed your native potential? We usually want people to perceive us as ultra-competent. But aren't the people we admire most the ones who help *other* people bring their gifts to bear?

If we bear up under difficult circumstances without trying to conceal them, it will become apparent that we have a source of power outside of ourselves, the very power that affected Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Serving Others by Leading (2 Corinthians 4)

Humility and weakness would be unbearable if our purpose in life were to make something great of ourselves. But service, not greatness, is the Christian's purpose. "We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). This verse is one of the classic biblical statements of the concept that has come to be known as "servant leadership." Paul, the foremost leader of the Christian movement beyond the confines of Palestine, calls himself, "your slave for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

Again, Paul seems to be reflecting on Jesus' own teaching here (see 2 Cor. 1:24 above). As leaders, Jesus and his followers serve others. This fundamentally Christian insight should inform our attitude in

any leadership position. This does not mean that we refrain from exercising legitimate authority or that we lead timidly. Rather, it implies that we use our position and our power to further others' well-being and not only our own. In fact, Paul's words "your slaves for Jesus' sake" are stricter than they may at first appear. Leaders are called to seek other people's well-being *ahead* of their own, as slaves are compelled to do. A slave, as Jesus pointed out, works all day in the fields, then comes in and serves dinner to the household, and only afterwards may eat and drink himself or herself (Luke 17:7-10).

Leading others by serving will inevitably lead to suffering. The world is too broken for us to imagine there is a chance that we may escape suffering while serving. Paul suffered affliction, perplexity, persecution nearly to the point of death (2 Cor. 4:8-12). As Christians, we should not accept leadership positions unless we intend to sacrifice the privilege of taking care of ourselves before taking care of others.

Performance and Accountability (2 Corinthians 5:1-15)

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul, who constantly faced situations that could result in his death, reminds the Corinthians that at the final judgment, each person will be "recompensed according to what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Cor. 5:10) These are unusual words for Paul (though not as unusual as one might expect—see Romans 2:6-10), whom we normally associate with the doctrine of grace, meaning that our salvation is entirely unmerited and not the result of our own works (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is, however, important that we allow our picture of Paul to be formed by what he actually says, rather than by some caricature. When we analyze Paul's teaching in its entirety, we find that it is in harmony with that of Jesus, James, and even the Old Testament. For all of them, faith that does not express itself in good works is no faith at all. Indeed, faith and obedience are so closely intertwined that even Paul can, as he does here, refer to the latter rather the former when he actually has both in mind. What we do in the body cannot help reflect what God's grace has done for us. What pleases the Lord can be described either as faith or, as here, as works of righteousness made possible by God's grace.

In any case, Paul's message is clear enough: How we live our lives matters to God. In workplace terms, our performance matters. Moreover, we will have to give an account to the Lord Jesus for all that we have done and left undone. In workplace terms, this is accountability. Performance and accountability are profoundly important to the Christian life, and we cannot dismiss them as secular concerns of no importance to God. God cares whether we are slacking off, neglecting our duties, not showing up for work, or going through the motions without genuine attention to our work.

This does not mean that God always agrees with what our workplaces expect from us. God's idea of good performance may be different from that of our manager or supervisor. In particular, if meeting our employer's performance expectations requires unethical activities or harming others, then God's

review of our performance will be different from our employer's. If your boss expects you to mislead customers or denigrate co-workers, for God's sake aim for a poor performance review from your boss, and a good review from God.

God holds us to a high standard of conduct. One day we will answer for the way we have treated our co-workers, bosses, employees, and customers, not to mention our family and friends. This does not negate the doctrine of grace, but instead show us how God intends his grace to transform our lives.

Reconciling the Whole World (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

If it sounds like Paul is calling us to grit our teeth and try harder to be good, then we are missing the point of 2 Corinthians. Paul intends for us to see the world in a completely new way, so that our actions stem from this new understanding, not from trying harder.

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Cor. 5:17-19)

Paul wants us to become so thoroughly transformed that we become members of a "new creation," The mention of "creation" immediately takes us back to Genesis 1 and 2, the story of God's creation of the world. From the beginning God intended that men and women work together (Genesis 1:27; 2:18), in concert with God (Genesis 2:19), to "till the ground" (Genesis 2:15), "give names" to the creatures of the earth, and exercise "dominion" (Genesis 1:26) over the earth as God's stewards. God's intent for creation, in other words, includes work as central reality of existence. When humans disobeyed God and marred the creation, work became cursed (Genesis 3:17-18), and humans no longer worked alongside God. Thus, when Paul says, "Everything has become new," everything includes the world of work as a core element.

Ironing Out the Differences

Wayne Alderson was vice president of Pittron Steel near Pittsburgh in the early 1970s. The company had very hostile labor/management relationships, and was facing a strike that could destroy the company. Management's approach to these negotiations was confrontational. But part way into the strike, Alderson began taking an approach of reconciliation with the union. "They are not our enemy," he said. "They are the people who do our work." He was tough, but fair, and demonstrated his respect for the people in the union. He developed an approach he called "Value of the Person," which not only achieved a settlement of the strike, but transformed the working environment of the company. "Everyone wants to be treated with love, dignity, and respect," he said. Each year the state of Pennsylvania selects a man of the year for labor; today, forty years later, it remains true that Alderson is the only person from management to receive this honor.

Alderson claims 2 Corinthians 5:18 as his life verse: "God has given me the ministry of reconciliation." He continues to work as a labor/management consultant for companies around the country, basing his message on valuing people.^[8]

God brings the new creation into existence by sending his Son into the old creation to transform or “reconcile” it. “In Christ, God was reconciling *the world* to himself.” Not just one aspect of the world, but the whole world. And those who follow Christ, who are reconciled to God by Christ, are appointed to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). We are agents to bring reconciliation to all spheres of the world. Every day as we go out to do our work we are to be ministers of this reconciliation. This includes reconciliation between people and God (evangelism and discipleship), between people and people (conflict resolution) and between people and their work (goods and services that meet genuine needs, improve the quality of life and care for God’s creation).

There are three essential elements of the work of reconciliation. First, we must understand accurately what has gone wrong among people, God, and the creation. If we do not truly understand the ills of the world we cannot bring genuine reconciliation, any more than an ambassador can effectively represent one country to another without know what’s going on in both. Second, we must love other people and work to benefit them, rather than to judge them. “We regard no one from a human point of view,” Paul tells us (2 Cor. 5:16)—that is, as an object to be exploited, eliminated, or adulated—but as a person for whom “Christ died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15). If we condemn the people in our workplaces or withdraw from the daily places of life and work, we are regarding people and work from a human point of view. If we love the people we work among and try to improve our workplaces, products and services, then we become agents of Christ’s reconciliation. Finally, being seeds of God’s creation, of course, requires that we remain in constant fellowship with Christ. If we do both of these things, we will be in a position to bring Christ’s power to reconcile the people, organizations, places and things of the world so they, too, can become members of God’s new creation.

Transparency Revisited (2 Corinthians 6:11)

As we noted earlier (under 2 Cor. 1:12-23), transparency is a recurring theme in this letter. It crops up again here, when Paul writes, “We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you” (2 Cor. 6:11). We might say that his life was an open book before them. Though he adds nothing new to what he has said previously, it becomes more and more apparent how important the topic of transparency is for him. When questions arise about his ministry, he can appeal to his earlier dealings with the Corinthians with absolute certainty that he has always been honest with them about himself. Can we say the same of ourselves?

Working with Nonbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Paul takes up the question of close relationships with non-Christians in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Up to this point, Paul has vividly portrayed the importance of good relationships with the people we work

with. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 that we should work with non-Christians, and he discusses how to do so in 1 Corinthians 10:25-33 (see "[1 Corinthians 10](#)" at www.theologyofwork.org).

But perhaps there are limits to the intimacy of Christians' working relationships with non-Christians. Paul tells the Corinthians "Do not be mismatched with unbelievers," as the NRSV puts it, or to translate the Greek term (*heterozygountes*) more literally, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." His words are reminiscent of Leviticus 19:19, which prohibits mating different kinds of animals together and Deuteronomy 22:10, which prohibits yoking an ox and donkey together while plowing. These two Old Testament precedents refer to mating and to work, respectively. We are concerned here with work.

What, then, are the limits in working with non-believers? Perhaps the key is the term "yoked." When two animals are yoked together, they must move in lockstep. If one turns left, the other turns left also, whether or not it consents. This is different from, say, animals grazing in a herd, which cooperate but still have the freedom to move separately, and even to depart from the herd if they choose. If two animals—or, metaphorically, two people—are yoked, each is bound by whatever the other chooses to do. Two people are yoked if one person's choices compel the other person to follow the same choices, even without their consent. A yoking is when either person is bound by the unilateral decisions and actions of the other.

Paul does not want us to be *un*-equally yoked. So what would it mean to be *equally* yoked? Jesus has already given us the answer to that question. "Take my yoke upon you," he calls to those who follow him (Matthew 11:29a). Paul tells us not to be unequally yoked with non-believers because we are *already* yoked to Jesus. One part of his yoke is around us, and the other is on Jesus' shoulders. Jesus, like the lead ox in a team, determines the bearing, the pace, and the path of the team, and we submit to his leadership. Through his yoke, we feel his pull, his guidance, his direction. By his yoke, he trains us to work effectively in his team. His yoke is what leads us, sensitizes us, binds us to Jesus. Being yoked to Jesus makes us partners with him in restoring God's creation in every sphere of life, as we explored in "[2 Corinthians 5:16-21](#)". No other yoke that would pull us away from the yoke of Jesus could ever be equal to that! "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," Jesus tells us (Matthew 11:29b), yet the work we are doing with him is no less than the transformation of the entire cosmos.

When Paul tells us not to be unequally yoked in working relationships, he is warning us not to get entangled in work situations that prevent us from doing the work Jesus wants us to do, or prevents us from working in Jesus' ways. This has a strong ethical element. "What partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness?" Paul asks (2 Cor. 6:14). If the dictates of a work situation lead us to harm customers, deceive constituents, mislead employees, abuse co-workers, pollute the environment, or such, then we would be yoked into a violation of our duties as stewards of God's kingdom. Yet ethics is not the only element. Besides *preventing* us from doing anything unethical, being yoked with Jesus also *leads* us to work to reconcile or restore the world to God's vision for it. At the very least, this

suggests that we pay careful attention to the motivations, values, integrity, working methods and similar factors when deciding where and with whom we work.

To be unequally yoked with unbelievers, then, is to be in a situation or relationship that binds you to the decisions and actions of people who have values and purposes incompatible with Jesus' values and purposes.

A few examples may help. A business partnership—joint, unlimited, ownership of a business—would generally seem to be a form of yoking. If one partner signs a contract, spends money, buys or sells property—or even violates the law—the other partner is bound by that action or decision. To form a business partnership in this sense would very likely be a form of unequal yoking. Even if the believer trusts that the non-believing partner(s) would not do anything unethical, is it possible that the non-believing partner(s) would want to run the business for the purposes of transforming the world to be more like God intends it to be? Even if the partnership does not force the believer to do evil, would it hinder him or her from doing all the good Christ desires? Joining an army, making a pledge of office, raising money for a non-profit organization, or buying property jointly might have similar consequences.

In contrast, a single commercial transaction—buying or selling an item between two parties—would generally not seem to be a form of yoking. The parties agree in advance on a single item of business and then perform what they agreed to. (The Christian, of course, should only agree to do the transaction if it is in accordance with God's values and purposes.) Neither party is bound by anything the other party might do after the transaction. Teaching a class, writing or being interviewed for a newspaper article, volunteering in a civic event, and babysitting a child are other examples similarly limited in scope and duration.

Buying stock is probably somewhere in between. As a part owner in the corporation, the stock owner is morally—though probably not legally—bound by the decisions of the directors, executives and other employees, but only for as long as he or she owns the stock. Likewise, getting a job, joining a faculty, raising money for a non-profit organization or political campaign, and signing a contract, all commit us to living with the consequences of others' choices, but not forever.

As these examples show, there is no hard-and-fast rule for what it means to be unequally yoked. In practice, it may be difficult to say whether a particular working relationship is a form of yoking. Getting a job in a secular organization is probably not a form of yoking. But going so far into debt that you can't afford to quit your job probably turns any employee relationship into a de facto yoking. You have lost the freedom to resign if the organization engages in ungodly activities. One rising lawyer was offered a partnership in a prestigious law firm, but declined when he observed how many of those who became partners got divorced soon after.^[9] It seemed to him that accepting a partnership would yoke him to values and practices incompatible with the commitment he made to put his wife first among the people

in his life.

Finally, we must be careful to not turn Paul's words into a we-versus-they mentality against non-believers. Paul knew as well as anyone that believers fall far short of the values and purposes of God. We should be careful not to be unequally yoked even with *Christians* whose conduct would pull us away from the yoke of Christ. Even more, we need to receive Christ's grace every day so that being yoked with *us* doesn't cause someone else to be pulled away from working according to Christ's ways and purposes. Nor can we judge or condemn non-believers as inherently unethical, since Paul himself refused to do so. "For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? God will judge those outside" (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). We are called not to judge but to discern whether our working relationships are leading us to work for the purposes and according to the ways of Christ.

Perhaps the best guidance is to ask ourselves the question Paul asks, "What does a believer share with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:15). If the answer is that we share similar values and goals with respect to the work we may undertake together, then it may serve God's will to work closely with non-believers. You can assess the opportunities and risks by exploring in advance all the commitments entailed in any work relationship. Consider how your individual capabilities and limitations might reduce or exacerbate the risk of being pulled away from working as God intends. This means that the decision whether to participate may be different for each person. Considering our differing strengths and weaknesses, a free association for one person could be a binding yoke for another. A recent graduate, for example, might find it relatively easy to quit a job, compared to a CEO with a large investment and reputation at stake. In other words, the larger our role in a working relationship, the more important it is to make sure we're not yoking ourselves into a situation we won't be able to handle in a godly way. In any case, *all* Christians would do well to consider carefully the entanglements that can arise in every workplace relationship, job, partnership, and transaction.

The Encouragement of Praise (2 Corinthians 7)

Immediately after admonishing the Corinthians, Paul praises them. "I often boast about you; I have great pride in you" (2 Cor. 7:4) It may come as a surprise for some to find Paul boasting so unapologetically about the church in Corinth. Many of us have been brought up to believe that pride is a sin (which is, of course, quite true) and even that pride in someone else's accomplishments is questionable. Further, we might wonder whether Paul's pride in the Corinthians is not misplaced. This was a congregation beset with many difficulties and there are some stinging rebukes in his letters to them. He wears no rose-colored glasses when it comes to the Corinthians. But Paul is entirely unabashed by such concerns. He does not shy away from giving praise where praise is due, and it seems that he is genuinely proud of the progress the believers in Corinth have made in spite of his

tense relations with them. He notes his pride in them is well deserved, not a cheap trick of flattery (2 Cor. 7:11-13). He repeats in 2 Corinthians 7:14 the point that praise must be genuine when he says, “Everything we said to you was true, so our boasting to Titus has proved true as well.”

This reminds us of the importance of specific, accurate and timely praise for coworkers, employees, and others we interact with at work. Inflated or generalized praise is hollow and may seem insincere or manipulative. And unrelenting criticism destroys rather than builds up. But words of genuine appreciation and gratitude for work well done are always appropriate. They are evidence of mutual respect, the foundation of true community, and they motivate everyone to continue their good work. We all look forward to hearing the Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21, NIV), and we do well to give similar praise whenever it's warranted.

Generosity Is Not Optional (2 Corinthians 8:1-9)

As we noted in the ["Introduction"](#), 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9 form a separate section of Paul's letter in which he addresses the topic of the collection for the churches in Judea. This project was a passion of the apostle's and he promoted it vigorously in his churches (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). Paul begins this section by pointing to the exemplary generosity of the churches in Macedonia and implying that he expects no less from the Corinthians. Just as the believers in Corinth have displayed an abundance of faith, ability to proclaim the truth,[\[10\]](#) knowledge, enthusiasm and love, so they should strive to abound in the “gift” (Gk. charis) of generosity. The term “gift” has a double meaning here. It has the sense of “spiritual gift” referring to God's gift to them of the virtue of generosity, and it has the sense of “donation,” referring to their gifts of money to the collection. This makes the point doubly clear that generosity is not an option for Christians, but part of the Spirit's work in our lives.

In the workplace, a generous spirit is the oil that makes things run smoothly on a number of levels. Employees who sense that their employers are generous will be more willing to make sacrifices for their organizations when they become necessary. Workers who are generous with their coworkers will create a ready source of help for themselves and a more joyful and satisfying experience for everyone.

Generosity is not always a matter of money. To name only a few examples, employers can be generous by taking time to mentor workers, providing a workplace of beauty, offering opportunities for training and development, genuinely listening to someone with a problem or complaint, visiting an employee's family member in the hospital. Coworkers can offer generosity by helping others do their work better, making sure no one is left out socially, standing up for those who suffer misuse, offering true friendship, sharing praise, and apologizing for offenses. Bill Diehl gives the example of a male executive whose generosity was simply to begin making his own coffee, instead of expecting the lower-ranking women in his office to do it.[\[11\]](#)

Timely Fulfillment of Obligations (2 Corinthians 8:10-12)

Paul reminds the believers in Corinth that they had already signaled their intentions to participate in the collection for the churches in Judea during the previous year. They seem, however, to have gotten sidetracked somehow. Perhaps lingering doubts about Paul's ministry and the tensions that surfaced during his previous visit play a role here. In any case, their effort is flagging, and at the time of Paul's writing they have not yet gathered all the contributions from individual members, as he had previously instructed them to do (1 Corinthians. 16:1-3).

Paul's advice is straightforward. "Finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means" (2 Cor. 8:11). Paul's advice is as relevant now as it was then, especially in our work. What we start we should finish. Obviously, there are many situations in which circumstances change or other priorities take precedence so that we have to adjust our commitments. This is why Paul adds, "according to your means." But often, as in the Corinthians' situation, the problem is merely one of dragging our feet. Paul reminds us of the need to carry through on our commitments. Other people are counting on us.

This advice may seem too simple to need mentioning in the word of God. Yet Christians underestimate how important this is as a matter of witness, in addition to productivity. If we do not fulfill ordinary commitments at work, how can our words or actions possibly convince people that our Lord will fulfill his promise of eternal life? Better to deliver a report, a part, or a raise on time than to deliver a lunchtime argument for the divinity of Christ.

Sharing the Wealth (2 Corinthians 8:13-15)

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the underlying principle behind the collection. "It is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need" (2 Cor. 8:14). It is not that the Judean churches should experience relief to the detriment of the Gentile churches, but rather that there should be an appropriate balance between them. The Judean believers were presently in need, and the Corinthian church was experiencing a measure of prosperity. The time might come when the tables would be turned, and then aid would flow in the other direction, "so that their abundance may be for your need" (2 Cor. 8:14).

Paul invokes two images to explain what he means. The first one, balance, is abstract, but in the ancient world, as now, it appeals to our sense that in the natural world and in society equilibrium leads to stability and health.^[12] The recipient benefits because the gift alleviates an abnormal lack. The giver benefits because the gift prevents acclimation to an unsustainable abundance. The second image is concrete and historical. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the ancient days when God gave the people

of Israel manna to sustain themselves (Exodus 16:11-18). Though some gathered much and others comparatively little, when the daily ration was distributed, no one had either too little or too much.

The principle that the richer should give their wealth to the poorer to the degree that everyone's resources are in "balance" is challenging to modern notions of individual self-reliance. Apparently, when Paul called Christians "slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 5:4) he meant that 100% of our wages and our wealth belong directly to God, and that God might want us to distribute them to others to the point that the income we keep for our personal use is in equal balance with theirs.

We must be careful, however, not to make simplistic applications to the structures of today's world. A full discussion of this principle among Christians has become difficult because it gets caught up in the political debates about socialism and capitalism. The question in those debates is whether the state has the right—or duty—to compel the balance of wealth by taking from the richer and distributing to the poorer. This is a different matter from Paul's situation, in which a group of churches asked their members to voluntarily give money for distribution by another church for the benefit of its poor members. In fact, Paul does not say anything at all about the state in this regard. As for himself, Paul says he has no plans to compel anyone. "I do not say this as a command" (2 Cor. 8:8), he tells us, nor is collection to be made "reluctantly or under compulsion" (2 Cor. 9:7).

Paul's purpose is not to create a particular social system but to ask those who have money whether they are truly ready to put it at God's service on behalf of the poor. "Show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you," he implores (2 Cor. 8:24). Christians should engage in plenty of discussion about the best ways to alleviate poverty. Is it through giving alone, or investment, or something else, or some mix? What role do the structures of the church, business, government, and non-profit organizations have? Which aspects of legal systems, infrastructure, education, culture, personal responsibility, stewardship, hard work, and other factors must be reformed or developed? Christians need to be on the forefront of developing not only generous, but effective, means of bringing poverty to an end.[\[13\]](#)

But there can be no question about the pressing urgency of poverty and no reluctance to balance our use of money with the needs of others around the world. Paul's forceful words show that we cannot be complacent when hundreds of millions of Christians enjoy superabundance, while billions of people suffer extreme poverty.

You Can't Out-Give God (2 Corinthians 9)

In urging the Corinthian believers to give generously Paul is aware that he must address a very human concern in a world of limited resources. Some of his hearers must have been thinking, "If I give as altruistically as Paul is urging me to give, there may not be enough to meet my own needs." Making use

of an extended agricultural metaphor, Paul assures them that in God's economy things work differently. He has already alluded to a principle from the Book of Proverbs, noting that the "one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (compare 2 Cor. 9:6 with Proverbs 11:24-25). He followed this up by quoting an aphorism from the Greek version of Proverbs 22:8, that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). From this he infers a promise that for the one who gives generously, God can and will cause all sorts of blessings[14] to abound.

[TrueMoveH: Giving \(Click to watch\)](#)

Paul, therefore, assures the Corinthians that their generosity does not come at the risk of future poverty. On the contrary, generosity is the route to *prevent* future deprivation. "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, *so that* by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). In the next two verses he assures those who sow (or "scatter") generously to the poor that God will provide them enough seed for that sowing *and* for bread for their own needs. He underscores this when he says, "You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us" (2 Cor. 9:11), a promise which encompasses and goes beyond material blessings.

Although Paul is clearly speaking of material generosity and blessing, we must be careful not to turn an assurance of God's provision into an expectation of getting rich. God is no pyramid scheme! The "abundance" Paul speaks of means "having *enough* of everything," not getting rich. The so-called "prosperity Gospel" profoundly misunderstands passages like this. Following Christ is not a money-making scheme, as Paul has been at pains to say throughout the letter.

This has obvious applications in giving away the fruits of our labor, that is, in donating money and other resources. But it applies equally well in giving of ourselves *during* our labor. We need not fear that by helping others succeed at work we will compromise our own wellbeing. God has promised to give us all that we need. We can help others look good at work without fearing it will make us look lackluster by comparison. We can compete fairly in the marketplace without worrying that it takes a few dirty tricks to make a living in a competitive business. We can pray for, encourage, support, and even assist our rivals because we know that God, not our competitive advantage, is the source of our provision. We must be careful not to distort this promise into the false gospel of health and wealth, as many have done. God does not promise true believers a big house and an expensive car. But he does assure us that if we look to the needs of others, he will make sure that our needs will be met in the process.

Assessing Performance (2 Corinthians 10-13)

As we noted in the "Introduction", 2 Corinthians chapters 10-13 constitute the third section of the letter. The most relevant parts for work come in chapters 10 and 11, which expand the discussion of on-the-job performance that began in chapter five. Here Paul is defending himself in the face of attacks by a few people he facetiously calls "super-apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5). In doing so, he offers specific insights directly applicable to performance assessment.

The false, super-apostles had been criticizing Paul for not measuring up to them in terms of eloquence, personal charisma, and evidence of signs and wonders. Naturally, the "standards" they chose were nothing more than self-descriptions of themselves and their ministries. Paul points out what an absurd game they were playing. People who judge by comparing others to themselves will always be self-satisfied. Paul refuses to go along with such a self-serving scheme. As far as he is concerned, as he had already explained in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, the only judgment—and therefore the only commendation—that is worth its salt is the judgment of the Lord Jesus.

Paul's perspective has direct relevance to our workplaces. Our performance on the job will likely be assessed in quarterly or annual reviews, and there is certainly nothing wrong with that. Problems arise when the standards by which we measure ourselves or others are biased and self-serving. In some organizations—typically those only loosely accountable to their owners and customers—a small circle of intimates may gain the ability to judge the others' performance primarily based on whether it falls in line with the insiders' self-interests. Those outside the inner circle are then evaluated primarily in terms being "with us" or "against us." This is a very difficult spot to find yourself in, yet because Christians measure success by God's assessment rather than promotion, pay, or even continued employment, we may be the very people who can bring redemption to such corrupt organizations. If we should find ourselves as beneficiaries of corrupt, self-dealing systems, what better witness to Christ could we find than to stand up for the benefit of others who have been harmed or marginalized, even at the expense of our own comfort and security?

Conclusion to 2 Corinthians

The unique circumstances that led Paul to write 2 Corinthians resulted in a letter with many important lessons for work, workers and workplaces. Paul repeatedly stresses the importance of transparency and integrity. He urges his readers to invest in good and joyful relationships at work and to pursue reconciliation when relationships are broken. He measures godly work in terms of service, leadership, humility, generosity, and the reputations we earn through our actions. He argues that performance, accountability and the timely fulfillment of obligations are essential duties of Christians at work. He gives standards for unbiased performance evaluation. He explores the opportunities and challenges of

working with nonbelievers. He implores us to use the wealth we gain from work for the good of the community, even to the point of making equal use of it to benefit others as we do to benefit ourselves. He assures us that in doing so we increase, rather than decrease, our own financial security because we come to depend on God's power rather than our own weakness.

Paul's words are extremely challenging because he says that serving others, even to the point of suffering, is the way to be effective in God's economy, just as Jesus himself effected our salvation by his suffering on the cross. Paul, while falling far short Jesus' divine perfection, is willing to live his life as an open book, an example of how God's strength overcomes human frailty. Because of his openness, Paul is credible when he claims that working according to God's ways, purposes, and values is truly the way to a fuller life. He passes on to us the words of the Lord Jesus himself, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). This admonition is just as important to our work today as it was to the Corinthians when Paul wrote this fascinating letter.

Key Verses and Themes in 2 Corinthians

VERSE	THEME
2 Cor. 1:3-4 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 ourselves are consoled by God.	Our experience of adversity and suffering can be a resource for others.
2 Cor. 1:12 Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God – and all the more toward you.	Transparency will convince others that our motives are pure.
2 Cor. 1:24 I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith.	Leadership involves service that increases others' joy.

<p>2 Cor. 2:12-13 When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said farewell to them and went on to Macedonia</p>	<p>Healthy relationships should be high on our priority list.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 2:17 We are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.</p>	<p>Integrity demands utmost sincerity.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 3:1-2, 5-6 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.</p>	<p>Outward trappings of success do not guarantee competence and integrity.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 4:1-2 Since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.</p>	<p>Our conduct should be so irreproachable that we never fear scrutiny.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 4:5 We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.</p>	<p>Leadership means exercising authority for others' good.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 4:7-11 We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.</p>	<p>If we portray ourselves as stronger than we really are, we lose the opportunity to point to the real source of our strength.</p>

<p>2 Cor. 5:10 All of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.</p>	<p>How we conduct ourselves matters to God.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 6:11, 7:2 We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you... Make room in your hearts for us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.</p>	<p>Transparency will offer proof of integrity.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 7:4, 14 I often boast about you; I have great pride in you.... For if I have been somewhat boastful about you to Titus, I was not disgraced; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting to Titus has proved true as well.</p>	<p>We should not be sparing in our praise of others' work.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 8:7 Now as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you - so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.</p>	<p>Growing generosity is a sign of growing faith.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 8:10-11 In this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something - now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.</p>	<p>We should keep our commitments in a timely fashion</p>
<p>2 Cor. 8:13-15 I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."</p>	<p>Believers who are well off are responsible to help those who are in need.</p>

<p>2 Cor. 9:8-11 God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.</p>	<p>If we use our resources to meet the needs of others, God promises to take care of us.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 10:12, 18 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense... For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.</p>	<p>We should measure ourselves by the Lord's standards and seek only his commendation.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 12:9-10 The Lord said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.</p>	<p>God is glorified when we bear up under adversity.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 12:14 Here I am, ready to come to you this third time. And I will not be a burden, because I do not want what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children.</p>	<p>We should work toward financial independence in order to be in a position to help others.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 13:11 Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.</p>	<p>A few simple guidelines will insure peace.</p>

ENDNOTES

- [1] Some scholars believe that 2 Cor. 10-13 is the “severe letter,” or at least part of it, that Paul mentions and that it was later tacked on to 2 Corinthians, which in its original form ended with 2 Cor. 9. For a brief defense of this thesis see Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), xviii-xxi. While it is true that the tone of 2 Cor. 10-13 is markedly harsher than that of the previous chapters, it seems more likely that 2 Corinthians was written as a unified letter from the start, though perhaps not all at the same time.
- [2] *Joy at Work* by Dennis W. Bakke and *Joy at Work Bible Study Companion* by Raymond Bakke, William Hendricks, and Brad Smith (Seattle: PVG, 2005) explores this question in detail.
- [3] Troas was an important center of trade and communication between Europe and Asia Minor. People traveled through this port from all over the Empire. Cf. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 300.
- [4] The Greek verb is found only here in the New Testament and means in its most basic sense “to engage in retail trade.” As such it was especially associated with peddlers and street vendors. It thus came to have a pejorative connotation that Paul activates here. Cf. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 253-254.
- [5] Murray J Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 258.
- [6] See Cicero, *Fam.* 13.6a. For a thorough discussion see Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul’s Relations with the Corinthians*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 2.23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 91-129, esp. 93-95.
- [7] Murray J Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 349.
- [8] “Wayne T. Alderson: Valuing People Helps Business,” *Ethix* 66 (Jul.-Aug.2009), accessed at <http://ethix.org/2009/10/01/valuing-people-helps-business>.
- [9] An incident reported confidentially to a member of the Theology of Work Project Steering Committee. Recorded August 24, 2011 at the Theology of Work Project 2011 summer conference in Los Angeles, CA.
- [10] Literally, “in speech.” See Murray J Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 574.

- [11] William E. Diehl, *The Monday Connection: On Being an Authentic Christian in a Monday-Friday World* (HarperCollins, 1992), 111.
- [12] Murray J Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 590.
- [13] John Stott, *The Grace of Giving* (Lausanne Movement, 2008) discusses giving in depth, based on his reading of 2 Cor. 8-9.
- [14] The term for “every” or “all” (*pan*) here has the connotation “every kind of” rather than “every possible” blessing. Cf. BAGD, 631c.