

# 2 CORINTHIANS

**An Explanation  
with Notes and Quotes,  
Illustrations and Applications**

*G. Michael Cocoris*



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## PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of 2 Corinthians. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: “What is the subject of this book?” Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators’ comments by putting their names in parenthesis, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of 2 Corinthians.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon. Rather than footnotes, the author’s name is in parenthesis in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

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# INTRODUCTION

Second Corinthians has been called Paul's "least systematic letter" (Lee), "the most autobiographical of all of Paul's epistles" (Hiebert), and "intensely personal" (Findlay).

This book records many things concerning Paul that are not recorded in Acts or anywhere else in the New Testament. Paul bears his soul in this epistle as in none of his other writings.

It also reveals more about the trials and tribulations, the problems and pressures of the ministry than any other book in the Bible. The apostle Paul had his integrity questioned and his whole ministry challenged. He had every right to be discouraged. Yet in 2 Corinthians, he reveals what prevented him from deceitfulness and discouragement. He repeatedly talks about the purpose of pressure.

## Author

Like 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians begins by identifying the author as Paul (1:1). The author twice calls himself Paul (see also 2:1). Tradition supports Pauline authorship. Clement of Rome, who quoted 1 Corinthians in about AD 97, did not quote from 2 Corinthians, but Polycarp did. He quotes 2 Corinthians 4:14 and 2 Corinthians 4:14 8:21 in his epistle to the Philippians. Polycarp wrote about AD 110. Other early authors quote 2 Corinthians.

The critics attack the unity of 2 Corinthians. They theorize that chapters 10-13 were not part of the original letter because the tone is different. The spirit of chapters 1-9 is joy and jubilation, whereas it is sadness and severity in chapters 10-13. Some critics claim that chapters 10-13 are part of the lost letter referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:4. The theory does not fit the facts. Second Corinthians 10-13 could not be the letter referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:4 because those chapters do not refer to an offender about whom the letter was written (2:5). Moreover, no manuscript, early author, or tradition supports such a position. The difference in tone is because of the change of address from the repentant majority to the rebellious minority.

## Recipients

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians on his third missionary journey during his last year at Ephesus, probably in the early spring of AD 57. Apparently, 2 Corinthians was written shortly after 1 Corinthians. All the events between the two epistles probably took place in seven or eight months (Thiessen). Thus, the date of 2 Corinthians is the fall of AD 57.

Reconstructing the background, especially some of the things that happened between 1 and 2 Corinthians, is complicated. The issues are: 1) How many visits had Paul made to Corinth before he wrote 2 Corinthians (2:1; 12:14; 13:1)? 2) How many letters had he written (2:3, 4, 9; 7:18, 12)? 3) Who was "the offender" (2:5; 7:12)?

There are two basic ways of reconstructing the life and letters of Paul to explain these references. The first claims that the references in 2 Corinthians to a previous letter are references to 1 Corinthians; therefore, the "offender" is the incestuous person of 1 Corinthians 5. The second view contends that the data in 2 Corinthians does not fit 1 Corinthians; therefore, there was another letter written by Paul to Corinth between 1 and 2 Corinthians. That letter is either



lost or it is 2 Corinthians 10-13. Those holding this theory usually say that based on the word “again” in 2 Corinthians 2:1, Paul must have briefly visited Corinth between 1 and 2 Corinthians, a “painful visit.” According to this view, the “offender” was not the incestuous person of 1 Corinthians 5 but the leader of a party opposed to Paul.

The traditional view contends that the data in 2 Corinthians does fit the facts of 1 Corinthians. The “previous letter” is, therefore, 1 Corinthians. The offender is the incestuous member, and there was no “painful visit.” The word “again” in 2 Corinthians 2:1 does not necessarily mean that Paul had visited writing 1 and 2 Corinthians. It simply means he did not want to return “in sorrow.” Second Corinthians 12:14 does not say Paul was coming for his third time. It says he was “ready” to come for the third time. He had planned to come (1 Cor. 16:5-9), evidently got ready to come (2 Cor. 12:14), but did not come (2 Cor. 1:15-17, 23). Second Corinthians 13:1-2 seems to suggest that his upcoming visit was his third, but in light of the word “ready” in 2 Corinthians 12:14 and even the wording of 2 Corinthians 13:1-2, he is not necessarily saying he had been there twice (see comments on 13:1-2).

Thus, the background should probably be pieced together as follows. Paul founded the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 3:6; 4:15; Acts 18:1-17). After eighteen months, He departed from Corinth and wrote a letter which is now lost (1 Cor. 5:9). While at Ephesus on his third missionary journey, Paul talked to members of Chloe’s household about quarrels in the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 1:11). Perhaps, at this point, Paul sent Timothy on a trip that included Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10). The New Testament is silent about what happened to Timothy. Perhaps he never made it to Corinth. The fact that Timothy is listed with Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:1 suggests that Timothy only got as far as Macedonia, where Paul caught up with him.

In the meantime, a committee arrived from Corinth with questions for Paul (1 Cor. 16:17; 7:1 ff.). Thus, Paul wrote the book now called 1 Corinthians to correct disorders (including divisions, incest, lawsuits, and fornication) and answer questions (concerning such subjects as marriage, meats, head coverings, the Lord’s Table, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and a collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem). Paul probably commissioned Titus to take 1 Corinthians to Corinth.

At any rate, after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he became deeply concerned about how the Corinthians would respond to what he had written (2 Cor. 7:8). He had called them carnal (1 Cor. 3:1) and had said some of them were proud (1 Cor. 4:18). Paul left Ephesus. At Troas and found an opportunity for the gospel (2 Cor. 2:12). However, because he did not find Titus there (2 Cor. 2:12-13) and since he was still eager to hear about the Corinthians, he hastened to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:13). The superscription in Manuscript B and the Peshitta Harklein, as well as in the Coptic Versions, say that 2 Corinthians was written from Philippi. That early tradition is probably correct. There, Paul found Titus (2 Cor. 7:6-7).

Titus gave Paul a report that was, on the whole, encouraging (2:14; 7:5-7). The Corinthians had responded properly to 1 Corinthians. They had even severely disciplined the incestuous member (2:5-11), but some, highly critical of Paul, were casting doubts in the minds of the Corinthians concerning his integrity. These opponents of Paul (see “false apostles” in 11:13), were accusing him of walking according to the flesh (1:12, 17; 10:2) of being deceitful (2:17; 4:2; 12:16), intimidating people with his letters (10:9-10), unjustly mistreating someone to the point of ruining him (2 Cor. 7:2), and defrauding people (2 Cor. 7:2). More specifically, he had promised to return and didn’t (1:15-17, 23; 2:1-4), mishandled the discipline of the incestuous fellow (7:2; 10:8; 13:7-10; also 2:5-11), and he didn’t take money on his first trip but was planning on “fleecing the flock” under the guise of a collection for the poor saints of Jerusalem on his next trip (8:20).

This situation produced a number of problems. First, these accusations raised questions in the minds of the Corinthians. They began to withdraw from Paul, at least emotionally. Also, would he be discouraged? Furthermore, he needed to address the situation concerning those falsely accusing him.

Thus, his rejoicing over the response of the Corinthians concerning church discipline and being concerned over the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem and his wanting to speak to the issue of the false apostles provoked his writing this letter.

The church at Corinth (1:1; 6:11) received this letter, the same church to which the previous epistle was directed. This letter was also intended to circulate throughout all Greece (Achaia): “with all the saints which are in all Achaia.” This may be because people outside the city would be expected to contribute to the fund that is discussed in chapters 8-9 (9:2; 11:10), or it may be explained based on Paul’s anxiety for the Christian cause in outlying areas that could be affected by the troubles in Corinth that he is seeking to settle by his epistle (Harrison, p. 276).

## **Message**

Second Corinthians is different from 1 Corinthians. First Corinthians is systematic, objective, practical, and deliberate and warns against pagan influences. Second Corinthians is not systematic. It is subjective, personal, and impassioned and warns against Judaism (Scroggie, vol. 2, pp. 142-143).

The subject of 2 Corinthians is the integrity of Paul’s ministry, the true minister and ministry. More specifically, it is the vindication of the genuineness of Paul’s ministry. It is a picture of a sincere, genuine minister of the gospel who is faced with trials, personal accusations against his character, and false teachers.

The message is the true minister cares for people, collects money from people for the ministry, corrects people, and sometimes must defend himself.

## **Structure**

Second Corinthians, like its predecessor 1 Corinthians, is a letter. Thus, the literary structure is an ancient letter consisting of a salutation, thanksgiving (prayer), body, personal greeting, and a benediction.

Many have pointed out that Second Corinthians is Paul’s least systematic letter. Consequently, it isn’t easy to analyze. The major divisions of Second Corinthians are clear. Outlining the sub-points under those major divisions is difficult.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-11
III. The Body of the Letter	1:12-13:10
A. Consolation (Comfort in the Ministry)	1:12-7:16
1. The Conduct of Paul	1:12-2:11
2. The Character of the Ministry	2:12-6:10
3. The Appeal to the Corinthians	6:11-7:16
B. Collection (The Ministry of Giving)	8:1-9:15
1. Arrangements for a Prepared Gift	8:1-9:5
2. Arguments for a Generous Gift	9:6-15
C. Vindication (Vindication of Paul's Ministry)	10:1-13:10
1. Readiness to Correct	10:1-12:18
2. Reluctance to Correct	12:19-13:10
IV. Personal Greetings, Admonition, and Benediction	13:11-14

## Purpose

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he had several minor purposes in mind. For one thing, he wanted to offer the church some instruction regarding the penitent offender (2 Cor. 2:5-11). There is a debate as to who this person was. He was probably the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5. A second minor matter concerned the further instruction regarding the offering they were raising for the poor saints in Jerusalem (9:1-5). He also writes because he wants to show his care for them (7:12).

The major motive and purpose were to defend and vindicate his apostolic authority. Paul's opponents had made a threefold assault on him. They attacked his person (10:10; 11:6), his character (1:11-17; 12:16-19), and his teaching (2:17; 11:4). He was accused of fickleness (1:17, 18, 23), of pride and boasting (3:1; 5:12), of obscurity in preaching (4:3), of weakness (10:10), of rudeness of speech (11:6), of being contemptible in person (4:7-10; 6:4-10; 10:10; 12:7-10), of being dishonest (12:16-19), of being hardly sound of mind (5:13; 11:16-19; 12:6), and of being no apostle (11:5; 12:12) (Scroggie, pp. 141-142). Paul answers each charge on his person (10:7; 13:4) and on his character (4:1, 2; 1:15-24; 12:14-18; 7:2; 5:13).

**Summary:** Paul wrote to the Corinthians to demonstrate his care and concern for them, give them further instruction, and vindicate his authority.

# WHY DOES GOD ALLOW ME TO SUFFER?

A man was riding on a crowded subway. There were no seats and very little standing room. Thus, he was standing in the aisle facing the door. He was also prone to motion sickness. As the train sped along, he began to feel sick to his stomach. The train raced into a station, the door automatically opened, and the man on the train standing by the door became, shall we say, violently ill. The door automatically closed and the train sped off. There happened to be a man standing at the station when all this happened. In utter dismay, he turned to the man behind him in line and said, “Why me?”

Have you ever asked, “Why me?” We all do, especially when we experience some difficulty. Everyone has trouble and everyone asks, “Why me?” Even believers walking with the Lord have trials and are tempted to ask, “Why me?” Indeed, even Christians serving the Lord have hard times, and they ask, “Why me, Lord? I’m serving you.”

Let me illustrate. I know of a man in the ministry who founded a church. Then he left town. After his departure, some critics who weren’t even there when he started the church ridiculed his appearance and questioned his integrity. During his ministry, he had to order the discipline of a sinning saint. They said he went too far, wronged the brother, and destroyed him. This pastor was also involved in raising money for Christian relief victims. His critics charged that he defrauded people and made merchandise of the ministry. One observer said that this pastor was accused of fickleness, pride, dishonesty, and not being of a sound mind.

Some men in the ministry have been accused of such things, and, unfortunately, the accusations were true. However, there is every reason to believe that the man was innocent in this case. Why would God allow such things to happen to a godly man? That particular minister had other severe trials in his lifetime. He often went without food or sleep for the sake of the ministry. He was slandered on more than one occasion and even falsely imprisoned. He had every right to ask, “Why does God allow me to suffer?”

Have you ever asked, why does God allow me to suffer? Have you ever experienced a trial and wondered why God permitted it? Have you ever experienced the untimely death of a spouse or a child, a divorce you didn’t foresee coming, a bankruptcy you could not prevent, a layoff at work, or a severe physical illness? In the midst of your trial, did you ever ask, ‘Why does God allow His children to suffer such things in this life?’

The man in the ministry of whom I spoke was none other than the apostle Paul. The church he founded and from which he received such severe criticism was the church at Corinth. In response to the criticism, he wrote them a letter, a letter we call 2 Corinthians, and he opens that letter explaining why God allowed him to suffer.

Second Corinthians 1:3-11 is a thanksgiving to God. It falls into two parts: 1:3-7 and 1:8-11. Paul thanks God for comfort and deliverance, but in the process, he explains why God allowed him to experience suffering in the ministry.

## For Comfort

*The Praise for Comfort* Paul begins with a declaration of praise: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (1:3). The word “blessed” is only used of God in the New Testament (Hodge). It expresses gratitude, adoration,

veneration, and praise. Paul praises God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus is God, He addresses God the Father as His God. For example, on the cross, He cried, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mk. 15:34; see also Heb. 10:7; Jn. 20:17). God the Father is both the God and Father of Jesus Christ. The Incarnate Son depended on God the Father; thus, God the Father was both His God and His Father. Hodge says, “Our Lord had a dependent nature to which God stood in the relation of God, and a divine nature to which He stood in the relation of Father, and, therefore, to the complex person Jesus Christ, God bore the relation of both God and Father.”

Paul praised God for being the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. The Greek word translated “mercies” means not only mercy but “compassion, pity.” The expression “the God of mercies” means “merciful father,” “compassionate father.” The Greek word rendered “comfort” means “to exhort, to encourage, to comfort, to cheer up.” Comfort is not soothing sympathy; it is something far more and far different. God is the source and supply of all comfort, outwardly by his providence and provisions and inwardly by His precepts and promises (for example, Rom. 15:13).

Moreover, God is the one who “comforts us in all our tribulation” (1:4a). The Greek word translated “tribulation” means “pressure” and was used figuratively of tribulation, affliction, and distress. One authority on Greek words illustrates the meaning of tribulation by saying, “When, according to the ancient law of England, those who willfully refuse to plead guilty had heavyweight placed on their breast and were so pressed and crushed to death, this was literally *thlipsis* (tribulation)” (Trench, p. 203).

*The Purpose of Comfort:* In “all,” God comforted Paul and Titus in every kind of tribulation (1:4a). He comforts “that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (1:4b). God did not comfort and encourage Paul so he could endure his own tribulation, but so that he could comfort others. Experiencing God’s comfort is never to be an end in itself; it is a means to the end so that we may be equipped to comfort others with the very same comfort with which God comforts us. No one can communicate comfort to those who have not been comforted.

God does not comfort us to make us comfortable but to make us comforters. Or, as someone has said, “To have suffered much is like knowing many languages: it gives the sufferer access to many more people.” A. B. Simpson declared, “You will have no test of faith that will not fit you to be a blessing if you are obedient to the Lord. I never had a trial, but when I got out of the deep river, I found some poor pilgrim on the bank that I was able to help by that very experience” (Simpson, cited in *Our Daily Bread*, 5/15/1987).

A young woman who was grief-stricken over the loss of her only son approached an elderly Christian philosopher for help. “I will be able to help you,” he assured her, “if you will bring me some mustard seed, but it must be obtained at a home where there has never been any sorrow.” Obediently, the woman began her search. In every place she visited, there had been trials and loss of loved ones. She returned to the philosopher and exclaimed, “How selfish I have been! Sorrow is common to all.” “Ah,” said the philosopher, “you have learned a valuable lesson and acquired a wealth of wisdom which not only has eased your own grief but also has prepared you to sympathize with others.”

*The Explanation* Paul explains, “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ” (1:5). The tribulations he spoke of in verse 4 are now called the sufferings of Christ. The sufferings of Christ are the sufferings that Christ experienced (Tasker). Those who follow Him experience the same sufferings He did. This is not, of course, Christ suffering for sin, but rather Christ suffering simply as God’s servant. Those who follow

Christ experience suffering, the suffering of service (Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:13; Col. 1:24; Jn. 15:20; Mt. 20:23; etc.). Paul says these sufferings abound in his life, but he quickly adds consolation, which is the same Greek word rendered “comfort” in verses 3 and 4, which also abounds in Christ. The comfort and encouragement of God (1:3) given through Christ (1:5) equal the sufferings he experienced in the service of Christ. Therefore, he could comfort others because (“for,” in 1:5) God’s comfort equaled his sufferings.

Suffering, which is the consequence of sin, does not have the comfort of God. Suffering, which is the result of service, does. In that case, comfort is never outweighed by suffering.

*The Application to Them* Paul adds, “Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation” (1:6). In this verse, Paul contemplates affliction (“if we are afflicted”) and comfort (“or if we are comforted”) and concludes that both are for their consolation and salvation. The Greek word translated “consolation” is the same Greek word which was translated comfort. Salvation means deliverance (7:10). Simply put, Paul is saying that if he was afflicted and received comfort, they can receive comfort and deliverance in their affliction (Hodge).

“And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation” (1:7). In other words, Paul’s expectation for them to experience comfort and deliverance in their affliction is confirmed (“steadfast”) because Paul knows from his own experience that as they partake of suffering, they will partake of comfort. After all, God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort (1:3). What God has proven Himself to be for Paul, He will prove Himself to be for other believers who look to Him.

Paul is not saying he received comfort and, therefore, he will comfort them. He says they will receive comfort from the same source he did, namely, from God through Christ (Plummer).

Paul began this subsection with praise to God (1:3). He blessed God as the Father of compassion and comfort and proceeded to use the word “comfort,” sometimes translated “consolation,” ten times in 5 verses. The main point of verses 3-7 is to bless God for His comfort and encouragement amid trial and tribulation, affliction and adversity, suffering and setbacks. He comforts us so we can comfort others.

Years ago, a man in England named William Moon became blind. At first, he was bitter, asking, “What are all my abilities worth now that I am shut up here in my room and the whole world is shut out.” Then, he began to realize that God had a wise purpose in allowing him to go blind. Because of his sightlessness, he began to develop a system of reproducing the alphabet to assist others who were blind. It was soon adapted to fit the languages of many different countries. More than four million blind people were enabled to read the Bible. They found that the kind of embossed type he used was easy to learn, even though it required more space on the page than the Braille System that later replaced it. William Moon had become a missionary in an unusual way and brought comfort and consolation to many.

## For Deliverance

*Paul’s Experience* At this point in the paragraph, Paul explains (see “for” in 1:8) the tribulation he experienced in more detail. Yet, this is still part of the thanksgiving because he returns to that theme at the end of the paragraph (1:11). “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above

strength, so that we despaired even of life” (1:8). Paul wanted the Corinthians to know about the trouble he had experienced in Asia and how he triumphed over it by trusting the Lord. The vagueness by which Paul speaks of his trouble suggests they knew what had happened to him. Unfortunately, we do not know the specifics. Asia is probably a reference to Ephesus (Plummer). It is generally assumed that the trouble was the uproar stirred up against him by Demetrius, the silversmith (Acts 19:23-41; 1 Cor. 15:31-32; Hodge). Whatever the difficulty, the Corinthians knew about it. Paul wants them to know how it affected him.

The ordeal was an excessive burden. The Greek word rendered “burden” was used of a beast of burden—crushed beneath too heavy a load (Tasker). It was so great it was beyond his power of endurance. The result (“that”) was that he was certain that he would die. Without divine intervention, he had no hope of survival. This was part of his sufferings for Christ (1:5).

Have you ever been in a situation you felt was beyond measure and above strength so that you despaired even of life? When I was pastor of the Church of the Open Door, we decided to sell our expensive downtown property and relocate to the suburbs. As a result, we were caught in a complex web of legal and political entanglements. At that point, someone said to me, “Unless God intervenes, we’re history.” Have you ever felt that way?

*Paul’s Explanation* God had a purpose in allowing Paul to have this experience. “Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us” (1:9-10). Paul faced death. It was as if the sentence of death had been pronounced. The Greek word “sentence” only occurs here in the New Testament and refers to an official (imperial) decision or verdict (edict) rather than a judicial sentence. As Paul faced this situation, it was as if an imperial edict of death had been issued. The royal troops were assembled to obey the order.

The divine purpose (“that”) for allowing Paul to face death was to teach him not to trust himself but the Lord. In facing death, Paul learned the futility of trusting himself. This time, he was utterly helpless (Plummer; Tasker). He had no choice but to abandon all self-confidence (Tasker). At that point, he had to trust the Lord, which is exactly what God wanted to teach him.

Paul called what happened to him “so great a death.” As far as he was concerned, he was as good as dead, but the God whom he trusted was a God who raises the dead. He not only rescues the dying, He raises the dead. Furthermore, this was not an isolated experience restricted to one event in Asia. Paul declares that God delivered him on that occasion, continued to deliver him, and was confident He would do so again in the future (Plummer). Paul returns to this theme of death/resurrection several times in this epistle (2:13 ff.; 4:7 ff.; and even 5:1 ff.; see also 12:17 ff. and 13:4).

*Paul’s Application to Them* One other factor needs to be noted. Paul adds, “You also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many” (1:11). The Corinthians were part of the process. God delivered Paul as he trusted the Lord—and they prayed. God has a purpose (“that”) in believers praying for one another. Through collective prayer, God grants the gift of deliverance. If many intercede, when God answers with deliverance from the jaws of death, God will be thanked by many (Plummer; Hodge). Implied, but not stated, is that collective prayers also promote unity. If believers pray together and praise together, they will be unified. The presence of false apostles produces division (chapters 10-13). Prayer for Paul’s “so great death” and praise for his rescue and resurrection united the Corinthians to him.

Someone has observed that often, the quickest way to help others get on their feet is for us to drop to our knees.

**Summary:** Praise God that He allows suffering to teach us to trust Him and not ourselves, to train us to encourage others, and to turn us to thank Him together. Suffering is for our own benefit, for the benefit of others in our lives, and for God's sake.

This passage is primarily a hymn of praise. It begins with "Blessed be the God" (1:3) and ends with many thanking God for what He has done. So, while there are several lessons to be learned from this passage, the greatest is that we are to learn to praise God in the midst of suffering.

Praise God for what He has done for me. He has taught me not to trust me but Him (1:9). He has delivered me (1:10). He has comforted and encouraged me (1:3).

Praise God for what He has done through me for others. He has equipped me to comfort and encourage others (1:4). He has caused others to pray and to praise (1:11).

Praise God for His comfort, encouragement, instruction, and deliverance.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

In prison, John Bunyan wrote: "I never knew what it was for God to stand by me at all turns and in every offer of Satan to afflict me, etc. as I have found him since I came here hither; for look how fears have presented themselves so have supports and encouragements; yet when I have started even as it were at nothing else but my shadow, yet God as being very tender to me hath not suffered me to be molested, but would with one Scripture or another strengthen me against all; insomuch that I have often said were it lawful I would pray for greater trouble, for the greater comfort's sake."

When you understand why God allows you to suffer, mainly, not only for your sake but for the sake of others to whom you will minister and ultimately for God's glory, your attitude toward it will change from self-pity to divine praise.



## A MESSENGER'S INTEGRITY

There was nothing unusual about the invitation. I had received many like it. "Will you come to speak to a group of teenagers?" I was an evangelist at the time, so such a request was common, although the location was different. I was invited to speak to a group of young people in Alaska! I grew up in Florida and was living in Tennessee. I'd never been to Alaska. I accepted the invitation and flew to our northernmost state. It was in the middle of winter and, consequently, it was cold, very cold. I'd never been that cold before in my entire life. My Florida blood needed antifreeze. Although the weather was different, the teenagers were the same as the ones I had spoken to in the "lower 48," as people in Alaska like to call all the continental states below the Canadian border. There was, however, one exception.

After hearing me speak in the first session, one teenage girl walked out and said, "He's a phony!" When that reaction got back to me, I was shocked and frankly grieved. As I recall, I'd never had anyone question my integrity before that occasion. I remembered thinking, "This is serious. If she doubts my sincerity, she will not believe what I have to say." That's true, isn't it? When a messenger's integrity is doubted, so is the integrity of his message. What do you do if that happens to you? Have you ever had your integrity questioned? What lessons can we learn from such an experience?

When the TV evangelist scandals of the 1980s were being paraded in the paper and on the evening news, the integrity of all preachers and Christians began to be questioned. Have you ever known of a pastor, parent, or peer who claimed to be a Christian but did something that made you doubt their integrity and the integrity of the message they said they believed?

No less than the apostle Paul had the experience. He founded a church in Corinth and eighteen months later, he left. As a result of a report of division and a request from the congregation to answer a number of questions, Paul wrote them a letter. We call it 1 Corinthians. In it, he promised to come back to Corinth (16:5-7). Later, he changed his plans and some questioned his sincerity. 1 Corinthians 1:12-2:5 is his response.

### **Declaration: Paul was a Man of Integrity**

*Paul's Character* Paul begins by declaring his integrity: "For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you" (1:12). The conjunction "for" indicates that this statement is connected to the preceding. The connection is probably in verse 11. They could indeed pray for him. He was a man of integrity (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker).

Paul boasted that his conscience could testify that he had lived with "simplicity and godly sincerity." The Greek word rendered "simplicity" means "simplicity, sincerity." The idea is singleness of heart, the opposite of duplicity. Paul did not have double motives. His simple and single motivation was to serve the Lord. He had "godly sincerity," that is, sincerity or purity from God (Hodge). He knew, and his conscience concurred, that his single motive was to serve the Lord and the Lord was working in his life. He was not just moral; he was genuinely godly. Both his conscience and his conduct testified that he was a man of godly sincerity.

To state the same thing another way, he had not lived by “fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God.” “Fleshly wisdom” is the kind of wisdom that does what is “wise” for the flesh; in other words, self-interest (Hodge; Tasker). The phrase also suggests cleverness, shrewdness, expediency, and unprincipled dealings with others (Plummer). Paul lived by the grace of God, not by his wisdom, but by God’s wisdom, not by his strength but by God’s power (1:9), not for himself, but for the Lord.

Paul’s character was evident to all who knew him, but it was “more abundantly” apparent to the Corinthians. He had spent eighteen months living and working among them (Plummer).

*Paul’s Letters* Evidently, Paul had been accused of being insincere in his letters of writing one thing, but being another (10:10). Therefore, he explains, “For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand” (1:13a). He did not write one thing and mean another (Hodge). They did not have to “read between the lines” (Plummer). His letter writing (1:13) was as genuine as his life (1:12). His sincerity and integrity extended to every area of his life, not just part of it (Tasker). He did not practice “selective spirituality.”

*Paul’s Application* “Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1:13b, 14). The Greek word translated “trust” is the word “hope” or “expectation.” Paul expects that they will recognize to the end of his life, whether by his death or the coming of Christ, as they already have to some degree, that he is their glory just as they are his in the day of the Lord Jesus (Hodge; Tasker). They had a part in his life and ministry by virtue of their prayers for him (1:11) and Paul is saying that they will be rewarded for it in the day of the Lord Jesus, that is, at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 1:8).

So why did Paul break his promise?

## **Defense: Paul Intended to Come**

*Paul’s Plans* Paul has declared his integrity and for a good reason. It was being questioned. In the letter called 1 Corinthians, he had announced that he would visit them en route to Macedonia (1 Cor. 16:5-7), but he had changed his plans and had not come to Corinth. Thus, he was being accused of being careless or acting with “fleshly wisdom” (1:12, 17). So now Paul defends his itinerary in particular, explaining, “And in this confidence, I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea” (1:15-16). With the confidence that he would be their glory in the day of the Lord Jesus, Paul had planned to visit them.

First Corinthians 16:5-7 says Paul had planned to go to Corinth through Macedonia and spend some time there provided the Lord permitted him to do so. In 2 Corinthians 1, however, Paul says he planned a double visit, one on the way to Macedonia and another upon leaving Macedonia. That way, they would have a “second benefit,” two opportunities to be ministered to by him (Rom. 1:11). They also could benefit him by helping him on his journey to Judea (Hodge). Thus, as stated in 1 Corinthians 16, Paul’s plan is different from his plan in 2 Corinthians. Apparently, after he wrote 1 Corinthians, he changed his plans slightly. So he says to them, now I not only planned to come, I planned to come twice!

*Paul’s Questions* Paul did not go to Corinth as planned (1:23). Did that mean he made these plans flippantly or was fickle? He was being accused of those kinds of impure motives, so he addresses these very questions: “Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the

things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?" (1:17). Were they to conclude (see "therefore") that his failure to fulfill his plans was because his plans were made lightly? The Greek word rendered "lightly" means "levity." Was he not serious when he said he was coming to Corinth, or worse yet did he make these plans "according to the flesh," that is, was he guided solely for his sinful, selfish nature with the result that he would be saying Yes, Yes, and No, No at the same time about the same subject? (Hodge). Was he careless or carnal? Was he flippant or fleshly?

As the Greek text indicates, these rhetorical questions expect a negative answer. At this point, Paul does not explain why he didn't go to Corinth as planned. He does that later (1:23). First, he speaks to another issue.

### **Digression: Paul's Preaching was Trustworthy**

*Paul's Preaching* If Paul's integrity was in doubt, what about his public preaching? Could his message be trusted? Paul addresses that issue by saying, "But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No" (1:18). The word rendered "faithful" means "trustworthy, dependable." The phrase "our word to you" does not refer to Paul's personal word but to his preaching (1:19). In other words, Paul says God is dependable; He can be trusted. Therefore, our preaching comes from Him and is not inconsistent, ambiguous, or undependable. It did not contain a yes or no at the same time.

As Paul goes on to explain ("for") "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes" (1:19). Paul's "word" (1:18), that is, his "preaching" consisted of the message about the Son of God, Jesus Christ. There is nothing in Him inconsistent or contradictory (Hodge). There is no "yes and no" in Him simultaneously. In Him, there was simply yes, that is, the truth. He can be trusted. This was the message of both Paul, Silas, and Timothy. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

Paul further explains the "yes" in Christ: "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (1:20). Everything in Christ is yes (1:19), meaning all that God's promises in Christ are true and trustworthy (1:20). God's promises in Christ are yes and amen. They are affirmed and confirmed through the preaching of Christ by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. People said "amen" to God's promises, which brought glory to God.

*God's Performance* Paul adds, "Now he who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit" (1:21-22). These verses describe God's work in establishing and sealing (see "He who" and "who also").

God establishes. The Greek word rendered "established" means "to establish, to confirm" and here it is in the present tense. At the time Paul penned these words, God was in the process of confirming "us" (Greek: "to" or "for") in Christ. At least the first "us" in verse 21 refers to Paul, Silas, and Timothy, as the additional phrase "with you" indicates. However, the phrase "with you" also means that God established the Corinthians. In the Greek text, the use of one article links "has anointed" (past tense) with "establishes." God confirmed Paul and his fellow workers by anointing them.

God anoints. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed when inaugurated into their office of service. God confirmed Paul and his companions by anointing them for service (Hodge). Some tribal people in East Africa pour lion oil upon themselves,

hoping to gain courage and strength for some great task. God anoints us with the Holy Spirit to serve Him (Tasker).

God seals. “Sealed” (past tense) is in the middle voice, meaning God sealed Paul and his coworkers (as well as all believers—Eph. 4:30) for Himself. Sealing indicates ownership, protection, and security (Hodge). Again, in the Greek text, as in the previous clause, the use of one article links “given us the Spirit ... as a deposit (present tense) with “sealed.” The Greek word translated “deposit” means “earnest, the first installment.” It was used as a down payment, which guaranteed the remainder would be paid (Plummer) and of an engagement ring, which guaranteed the marriage would take place (Tasker). God has given the Holy Spirit to seal the believer now and guarantee immortality (2 Cor. 5:5) and an inheritance (Eph. 1:13) later.

The Greek word translated “sealed” was a common word in Greek legal documents. It was used, for example, of a woman who, upon selling cows, received one thousand drachmae as a “seal” that the rest of the purchase price would be paid (Barclay).

Thus, these two verses, which primarily refer to Paul and his colleagues but no doubt include the Corinthians (“with you”) and all believers, teach that God confirms through anointing for service and seals by giving the Holy Spirit, who is also the deposit for more to come. Each member of the Trinity is involved. God establishes/confirms believers to Christ and gives the Holy Spirit. God’s promises in Christ are yes and amen (1:20).

### **Defense: Paul did not come for their Benefit**

*To Spare Them* After the digression of verses 18-22, Paul returns to the subject of the change in his travel plans (Plummer): “Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth” (1:23). Paul calls God, who confirms us in Christ, as a witness to the truth of what he is about to say. He changed his plans to spare them! He would have come with a rod (1 Cor. 4:21). To spare them the pain of correction and allow them to correct themselves, he didn’t come as planned (Hodge). His change of plans had nothing to do with making them flippantly or according to the flesh (1:17).

Paul clarifies something that could be misunderstood. “Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand” (1:24). By saying he didn’t come to Corinth to spare them, he could have been misunderstood to be claiming that he had the right to rule them, so he clarifies (Plummer). He acknowledges that neither he nor his fellow workers have dominion or dictatorial power over them. Not even an apostle has absolute authority over others. Instead, they were fellow workers merely working for the joy of the Corinthians.

As he explains (see “for”), they stand or fall by their faith. Paul had the authority of an apostle to discipline, but he could not dominate or even dictate their standing before God. He knew they had to choose to believe or not believe the Lord. They would determine if they stand or fall spiritually. The point is that Paul did not come so that he could spare them (1:23). He did not try to lord it over them, only help them in their faith and joy.

*To not come in Sorrow* There was a second reason Paul changed his plans: “But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow” (2:1). Some say that this verse indicates that Paul had visited Corinth “in sorrow” and since his first visit was not “in sorrow,” he must have been there twice (Hughes; see also Plummer; Hodge; Tasker), but such a conclusion is not necessarily the meaning of the text. Paul is simply saying that he did not want

to come to Corinth again—this time “in sorrow.” There was no second “painful” visit, as is often supported (see Introduction).

He explains, “For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?” (2:2). Paul decided not to come “in sorrow” because if he made them sorrowful, he would not be happy himself! When an individual grieves someone else and he is grieved because of it, the only one that can once again gladden his heart is the one he has saddened. Paul cared for them enough that he would be saddened if he caused them grief (Plummer). He would not be happy if they were unhappy.

What Paul is saying is not new “And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all” (2:3). He wrote to them about the item causing pain so that they would resolve it and there would be no sorrow when he came. After all, his visit ought to be an occasion of joy. What would make him happy is what would make them happy, mainly their obedience.

To what letter does Paul refer? Some take the statement “I wrote” as a reference to this letter, that is, “I am writing (Chrysostom). The traditional view is that Paul has 1 Corinthians in mind (Hodge). Some modern commentators believe the references to a letter written between our 1 and 2 Corinthians which is either lost (Tasker) or that 2 Corinthians 10-13 is that letter. The traditional view is undoubtedly the correct one (Barclay).

How can one who claims to be a worker for their joy (1:24) write a letter that he knew would make them sorrowful? Paul explains, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you” (2:4). Writing as he did was not fun for him, nor was his purpose to cause them grief. He deeply loved them, and their disobedience broke his heart. Out of much anguish in his heart and through the tears trickling down his face he wrote because he loved them so much (Hodge).

Paul did not rebuke them to cause them pain. When John Knox was on his deathbed, he said, “God knows that my mind was always void of hatred to the persons of those against whom I thundered my severest judgments” (Hughes).

**Summary:** When a messenger’s integrity is questioned to the point that his message is doubted, he should defend his integrity to protect the message.

This passage of Scripture reminds us of several pertinent truths concerning the minister and the ministry.

For example, messengers should have godly sincerity. Our spiritual message is not like the mail. The integrity of the mailman doesn’t matter, but in the case of delivering the message of the Scripture, people expect the mailman to practice what he delivers. The messengers of Christianity are not just mailmen but ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20).

Nevertheless, perceived inconsistency is probably unavoidable. Even the apostle Paul was criticized for living according to the flesh. It did appear that he made a promise and broke it. No matter how sincere or godly, men in the ministry will be perceived as inconsistent.

When a messenger’s integrity is questioned to the point of doubting his message, he needs to defend his integrity to protect his message. That’s what Paul did here. In a sense, that is what this whole book is about.

When a teenage girl in Alaska questioned my sincerity, I was shocked and wanted to know how, having just met me, she could conclude I wasn’t sincere. I insisted that the matter be pursued and, if possible, resolved. Those who talked to her told me that she had had a very

unhappy life, particularly in the previous six months. I came into town with a happy smile stretched across my face, speaking on how always to be happy. Her response was no man can be that happy. Thus, she had no basis for questioning my integrity. It was simply a projection of her own experience. Nevertheless, she concluded I was a phony and told a number of people that. I talked with her and by the end of the week, she was convinced I was genuine and speaking the truth.

One other word. Frankly, your relationship to Jesus Christ should not be affected by what others do or do not do. You stand by your faith (1:24). I learned that lesson early in my Christian experience. Several Christian leaders did something that devastated me. In a depressed state, a friend said to me, you must learn to trust the Lord, not men. That was a valuable lesson.

The messengers of Christianity should have personal integrity, but frankly, the message of Christianity, namely, the promises of God, are true and trustworthy whether His representatives are or not.

## BEWARE OF DOING TOO MUCH

Several years ago, I was asked to help a church settle a dispute. Here was the situation. A man in the congregation had two teenage daughters. Before becoming a Christian, he had sexually molested the older daughter. Several years later, he had not done anything for a long time, and he had trusted Christ, but the older daughter suspected that he was doing what he had done to her younger sister. So she went to a church board member with her suspicions and the board member decided that her father should be punished.

The problem was the father was not doing anything wrong. He said that and the younger daughter agreed. He even took his daughter to a doctor who examined her and concluded that she had not been molested.

Nevertheless, the board member insisted that this man be disciplined. The board member strongly urged that he should not be allowed to perform any ministry for six months and that he should be put on probation for two years after that. Other board members disagreed and I was asked to settle the dispute.

What would you suggest: 1) No church discipline at all. 2) No ministry for six months. 3) Probation for two years. 4) More punishment. 5) Less punishment. What is the purpose of church discipline? Is it possible to go too far? When is enough?

### A Sinning Believer Caused Grief to the Church

*The Sinning Believer* In the opening verses of 2 Corinthians 2, Paul spoke of his great grief over the church at Corinth (2:1-4, esp. 1:4). Now he writes, “But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe” (2:5). In the Greek text, the word “if” indicates a condition that is assumed to be true. Someone in the church at Corinth did cause grief. Who? There are two views concerning the offender: 1) The incestuous man of 1 Corinthians 5 (Barnes; Hodge). 2) An individual who wronged Paul himself by his rude and disagreeable conduct (Plummer; Tasker). The first of these two is the traditional view, which was virtually universally held until modern times. There is no compelling reason not to accept it and much to commend it. For example, Paul plainly says this person did not grieve him, but all of you. They had disciplined this person (2:6-11).

*The Sorrowing Church* Thus, the incestuous brother is the one who caused grief, pain, and distress, but, as Paul explains, the sinning brother had not offended him. He had offended and grieved the whole church! He says this because he does not want the situation to be too severe. Paul diplomatically and delicately handles the incestuous brother. He does not name him. He says the brother had not grieved him, and he says not to be too severe with the sinning brother.

The Bible teaches churches should practice discipline for outward, overt sin (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Such sin is a blight on the whole church.

### The Sinning Believer had been Sufficiently Disciplined

*The Disciple* In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul had instructed the Corinthian congregation to discipline the incestuous believer. Now he writes, “This punishment which is inflicted by the majority is

sufficient for such a man” (2:6). The Greek word rendered “majority” means “much, many.” It is being used here for either 1) the congregation considered as many (Hodge) or 2) the majority, implying a dissent of a minority (Tasker). Whether or not there was a dissenting minority, the Corinthian congregation followed Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 5 and disciplined the incestuous brother. Discipline consists of not socializing with that person (1 Cor. 5:11, 13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15)

*The Result* It worked! The sinning believer repented. Thus, Paul says the punishment was sufficient. The word rendered “punishment” means “to warn, to censure, to rebuke” (see the verb form in Mt. 8:26, 16: 20; Mk. 10: 13; Lk. 8:39; 23:40). The collective congregational censure was adequate. What they did satisfy the requirements of the case. Nothing more needed to be done (Plummer).

The purpose of church discipline is repentance and restoration. The man had repented. Now he should be restored.

### **So Forgive Him lest more Damage be Done**

*Forgive Him* Thus, Paul says, “So that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow” (2:7). Since the sinning believer had repented, rather than continue the discipline, the result ought to be forgiveness and encouragement (Hodge). The word rendered “comfort” contains several nuances, including exhort, encourage, entreat, as well as comfort, console, and cheer up.

Now that the man has repented, he could be “swallowed up with too much sorrow if they did not forgive him.” The Greek word translated “sorrow” means “grief.” A number of different explanations of “swallowed up with too much sorrow” have been suggested. Barnes says, “His life would waste away under the effect of his excommunication and disgrace, and the remembrance of his offense would prey upon him and sink him to the grave.” MacDonald says, “He might despair of the reality of his forgiveness and go on in constant gloom and discouragement.” Hodges says, “Without restoration and reconciliation with the congregation, this believer could be consumed with grief, driven to despair and, thus, destroyed.” Other commentators say that conjectures include isolation and despair (Tasker), reckless indulgence in sin, and even suicide (Plummer).

Paul concludes, “Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2:8). The word “therefore” indicates a conclusion based on the last clause in the previous verse. Because of the danger of the repentant brother being swallowed up with too much sorrow unless they forgive him, they are urged to reaffirm their love (Hodge; Tasker).

Paul does not demand the reaffirmation (Plummer). He asks that they reaffirm their love for him. The Greek word rendered “reaffirm” means “to ratify, make valid.” It was used in a legal context of validation (see Hodge). They needed to ratify their love. Perhaps this implies an official resolution, readmitting the repentant offender to their fellowship (Hodge). They are to, at least, forgive, encourage, and love him.

Paul explains, “For to this end I also wrote that I might put you to the test that whether you are obedient in all things” (2:9). In other words, they should ratify their love for him because the purpose for which Paul wrote to them had been accomplished. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to test them (Hodge). The test was to see if they would be obedient in all things.

Our attitude must not be, “Well, you have really done it this time.” It should be to receive the repentant brother back into fellowship lovingly. The backslider who turns back to the Lord needs



the backing of the church. The believer who deserves love the least needs it the most. Studies reveal that when teenagers run away and return home, they are resented, not restored, especially when the parent finds that his child has become a social liability. More than one returned runaway has been confronted by a father who snarls, “I don’t know if I can forgive you, this time you’ve done it.”

*To Prevent more Damage* Paul adds, “Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ” (2:10). Paul assures them that if they had forgiven the offender, so had he. As he explains (see “for”), he has already forgiven the thing done and the person who did it. Before the Lord, he forgave that individual for the sake of the congregation. His forgiveness of the offender was for the benefit of the church (Tasker).

Had Paul not forgiven, more damage would have been done. “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2:11). The Greek word translated “take advantage” means “to cheat, defraud.” Satan would cheat us out of the valuable spiritual experience of forgiveness. As Paul says, “We are not ignorant of his devices.” The Greek word rendered “devices” means “thought, mind, purpose, design.” His purpose is to keep us from being Christ-like and he would even use church discipline to accomplish that end.

The believer should not be ignorant of Satan’s devices. By studying the Scripture and seeing what Satan has done in the past, we can know his tactics in the present and, thus, defend ourselves against him and not be defeated by him. For example, Satan blinds the mind of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4); he plucks the Word of God from their hearts (Mt. 13:19). He puts doubt in people’s minds about the Word of God and denies the goodness of God (Gen. 3:1, 4-5). He also quotes Scripture and leads people astray (Mt. 4:6). The Devil does, of course, tempts us to sin, including pride (1 Tim. 3:6), lying (Acts 5:3), sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Tim. 5:11, 15). He affects the body (Job 1-2; 2 Cor. 12:7) and hinders God’s servants (1 Thess. 2:18).

General George Patton encountered General Rommel in North Africa in World War II. It is reported that in the thick of battle, Patton shouted, “I read your book, Rommel, I read your book!” The famous “Desert Fox” detailed his military strategy in his book *Infantry Attacks*. Patton had read it and, thus, knew how to defeat him.

**Summary:** When a disciplined believer repents, we should forgive and love him, lest more damage be done to him and us.

There are two extremes in church discipline. The Corinthians went from one extreme to the other. First, they did not discipline at all (1 Cor. 5). Then, when they did discipline, they did not want to forgive when he did repent (2 Cor. 2). Avoid the extremes of too little and too much.

This passage deals with the extreme of doing too much. When a disciplined brother repents, forgive him. Earlier I told of a church that asked me to settle a dispute concerning church discipline (see the introduction of this chapter). After listening to both sides, I concluded that they should do anything else. The man was not sinning. There is no such thing as punishment or probation by a church in the New Testament. Discipline, yes. Destroy him after he repents, no!

That is what some want to do. For example, Tertullian taught that incest was unforgettable and that it was impossible for one guilty of that sin to be restored to a state of grace and salvation (Hughes). Hughes, however, says, “Discipline which is so inflexible as to leave no place for repentance and reconciliation has ceased to be truly Christian; for it is no less a scandal to cut off the penitent sinner from all hope of re-entry into the comfort and security of the fellowship of the redeemed community than it is to permit flagrant wickedness to continue unpunished in the body

of Christ. The Christian who falls into sin, however deplorable his sin may be, may still look to Jesus Christ, the righteous, as his advocate with the Father (1 Jn. 2:1).”

Do not damage the returning sinner or yourself more by harboring an unforgiving spirit.

Remember, Paul worked for their joy (1:24). He loved them (2:4) and wanted them to love one another (2:8). It is when we know that we are loved and we love others, including confronting them, forgiving them, and encouraging them that there is joy.

In his book *David and His Friends*, Lewis Albert Banks tells the story of a king who had a silver bell placed in a high tower of his palace. He announced that whenever he was happy, his subject would know it by the ringing of the bell. The people waited for the sound of the silver bell, but it remained silent. Days passed into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years, but the bell never rang. Years later, when the king was old and gray and lying on his deathbed, some of his subjects gathered around him weeping. He learned that through all the years, he had been loved by his people. Finally, he was happy. Just before he died, he reached up and pulled the rope that rang the bell.

That apocryphal story illustrates two truths. In the first place, being loved brings joy. The other truth is that it is possible to live a lifetime not knowing you are loved and consequently not having joy. We should love one another, including those who sin, so their joy and our joy can be full.

## THE EXPERIENCE CALLED “MINISTRY”

On many occasions—literally hundreds—I have stood before a group of people and said, “Ask me anything you wish,” meaning, of course, ask me anything you wish about the Bible or the spiritual life. I have been amazed at how often I have been asked about myself first and then about the Bible. People are curious about men in the ministry. What is it like to be in the ministry?

Some are suspicious. They look at a preacher and wonder if he is genuine. They listen and ask themselves, “Is he real?” There are phonies and fakes in the ministry. People want to know that the man in the ministry is sincere. Others are not as suspicious as much as they need reassurance. Rumors run rampant. The slightest miscue can cause questions. In those cases, people need to know that the man in the ministry is genuinely godly.

Those kinds of doubts and questions occur often. They even appeared in connection with the ministry of the Apostle Paul. In his case, on at least one occasion, he answered the doubts and questions in people’s minds by giving them a glimpse into his experience as a man in the ministry. His experience is common to all ministers.

To educate those with doubts and questions and encourage those in the ministry (which actually should include all believers), consider an episode in the ministry experience of the Apostle Paul.

### Love for People Causes Anxiety

In 2 Corinthians 2:4, Paul wrote, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.” His mention of grief in verse 4 prompted him to point out that the sinning believer did not grieve him and he did not want the sinning believer to grieve to the point that he would be destroyed (2:5-11). Now, he returns to his care and concern for the Corinthians (Hodge).

*At Troas* “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord” (2:12). To understand what is said in this verse and the next, it is necessary to piece together what happened between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians. There are several different ways to do that.

Second Corinthians refers to a letter Paul wrote (2:3, 4, 9; 7:8, 12) and, perhaps, to two previous visits (12:14; 13:1). There is also an allusion to an “offender” (2:5; 7:12). There are two basic ways of reconstructing the life and letters of Paul to explain these references. The first claims that the references are to Paul’s original visit to Corinth and to 1 Corinthians and, therefore, “the offender” is the incestuous person of 1 Corinthians 5.

The second view is that the data in 2 Corinthians does not fit 1 Corinthians; therefore, there was another letter written by Paul to Corinth between our 1 and 2 Corinthians. Some claim this letter is lost, while others say it is from 2 Corinthians 10-13. According to this view, Paul briefly paid a “painful” visit to Corinth between 1 and 2 Corinthians (see “again” in 2:1) and the “offender” was not the incestuous person of 1 Corinthians 5, but the leader of a party opposed to Paul.

Does 2 Corinthians refer to 1 Corinthians or some other letter? Did Paul make a visit to Corinth between 1 and 2 Corinthians? Who was the offender? What happened between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

At some point, Paul sent Timothy on a trip to include Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 6:10). Later, he sent Titus directly to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:13). Paul then left Ephesus himself and traveled to Troas. When he got to Troas, he had an opportunity to evangelize.

In other words, there was no letter or brief “painful” visit between the writing of 1 Corinthians and the writing of 2 Corinthians. This view assumes the references to a previous letter in 2 Corinthians (2:3, 4, 9; 7:8, 2) are to 1 Corinthians, that the “offender” (2:5; 7:12) was the incestuous believer of 1 Corinthians 5 and that Paul had only been to Corinth once before writing 2 Corinthians. The word “again” in 2 Corinthians 2:1 does not necessarily mean that Paul had paid them a “painful” visit. It could mean he did not want to return in “sorrow.” Second Corinthians 12:14 only says that he was “ready” to come a third time, and 1 Corinthians 13:1-2 seems to say that this was the third time he was about to visit them.

He came to Troas to preach the good news about Christ, and the Lord gave him an open door, which was a great opportunity to do it. Those who purpose to enter open doors find doors open no matter where they are whether in Troas (2 Cor. 2) or in prison (Phil. 1).

*To Macedonia* Even though he had a great opportunity to evangelize in Troas, Paul says, “I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia” (2:13). The Greek word rendered “rest” means “rest, relaxation, relief.” There was tension inside him (Plummer). He was “uptight.” He had no peace of mind. He was anxious because he did not find Titus at Troas.

Apparently, he had sent Titus to Corinth and told him to return through Macedonia and Troas on his return to Ephesus. He expected to find Titus at Troas, but he was not there. The apprehension was not over Titus (Tasker). He was deeply concerned about the Corinthians. He was so concerned that he left a great opportunity to evangelize and went to Macedonia to look for Titus so he could get news about Corinth.

Paul is making a point that he dearly and deeply loved them (2:4). He loved them so much that he left work unfinished at Troas just to find someone who could tell him how they were doing. Love produces anxiety.

I was once counseling a couple who were experiencing marital difficulties. One week, we had a very rocky session. It was so bad that I thought for a while that the counseling relationship would be terminated and that their marriage would be in even deeper trouble. We managed to make an appointment for the next Saturday at 9 am.

I arrived at my office shortly before 9 am that Saturday, but the couple was not there. They had been late before, so at first, I didn’t think anything about it, but while they had been late before, their tardiness was never more than a few minutes. By 9:05, I became concerned. At 9:10, I thought, “Oh no, they will not keep the appointment.” I jumped to the conclusion that he had gotten so mad he refused to come. That kind of thing had occurred on one other occasion. I tried to reassure myself. Maybe they had a flat tire. Maybe they had an accident on the way. Perhaps they were right this minute arguing with each other about whether or not they should come.

By 9:15, I was deeply concerned. I was certain now they would not come. I got nervous and felt sick in the pit of my stomach. I began to reminisce over the brief counseling relationship I had with them. He had not done one single thing I had asked him to do. He was a selfish, self-centered, self-seeking husband. In our last session, he had become unreasonable to an extreme. I

could easily imagine that not only were our counseling sessions over, but so was their marriage. That's the kind of anxiety Paul felt at Troas.

## Ministering out of Godly Sincerity Produces Praise

*Paul's Praise* Abruptly, spontaneously, Paul burst forth with a hymn of praise, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place" (2:14). This interpretation becomes an extended digression. Paul does not resume the narrative of his trip to Macedonia and his meeting with Titus until chapter 7, verse 5. At this point, he either met Titus or remembered the experience of finally seeing Titus again. There is no doubt that Titus's report concerning the spiritual state of the Corinthians caused Paul to praise God (Hodge).

Using the graphic metaphor of the Roman triumphal procession, Paul praises God. When a Roman general was victorious in battle, he led his army and the captives in a parade down the main street with many people looking at the scene. In this case, God is the general who has conquered; Paul is one of his officers following in his train (Plummer). God granted Paul the privilege of sharing in the triumph of His Son.

How did Paul share in the triumph of Christ? The answer is he made Christ known. Paul shared in His triumph as he preached the gospel and people came to know Christ. Paul again uses the Roman triumphal procession to communicate this aspect of the concept. Priest carrying sensors giving forth incense followed the conquering captain. Paul, the believer priest (or "divine sensor"), gave forth the fragrance of Christ (Plummer).

Such was Paul's experience "in every place." It was his experience in Troas (2:12), no doubt, in Macedonia (2:13), and certainly in Corinth. Everywhere Paul went, the fragrance of Christ was released (Rom. 15:19). Can this be said of you?

President Woodrow Wilson had one brief contact with D. L. Moody. He described: "I was in a barbershop," he said, "When I became conscious that someone unusual had entered the room. A man had come in quietly and sat in the chair beside mine. Every word he uttered showed a personal and vital interest in the one serving him, though he was not the least formal or pompous. Purposely, I lingered until after he left and noted his visit's singular effect on the barbers in that shop. Their conversation was quiet and subdued. Though they did not know his name, somehow, his presence had elevated their thoughts and impressed them greatly. Personally, I left there feeling I had been to a place of worship."

*Paul's Preaching* Changing the metaphor slightly (Hodge), Paul explains further (see "for") his part in the triumph of Christ. He writes, "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2:15). In verse 14, the fragrance is the knowledge of Christ. In verse 15, the fragrance is Paul. Actually, there is only a slight difference between the two statements. Through Paul and others who preach the gospel (see "through us" in 2:14), people come to know Christ.

The fragrance of Christ is 1) To God. 2) Among those being saved. 3) Among those perishing. Those who spread the gospel are fragrance to God. In other words, the preaching of Christ is well-pleasing to God, but how is it that the gospel is a fragrance to saved and perishing men?

Paul goes on to explain, "To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life" (2:16a). The fragrance of Christ in the gospel is a deadly perfume to unbelievers and a vital fragrance to believers. This perfume has made more than one

fragrance. To one, it is the sweet smell of life; it results in life (Tasker). To another, it is the aroma of death, that is, it results in death (Jn. 3:36).

The captain in a Roman triumphal processional was followed by a priest dispensing incense, officers, soldiers, and captives. The aroma of the event was life to the soldiers and death to the captives (Barclay).

To some people, believers are perfume; to others, we “stink.” Parade Magazine tells of a man with a most unusual profession. The article reads, “Andy is a human stench-bomb ... but he loves it because that’s how he earns his living. Andy is a bill collector for a London magazine that sends him out to advertising clients who’ve been delinquent or refused to pay their bills. Dressed in a 22-year-old raincoat impregnated with the most horrible substances available, Andy plunks himself down in the reception room or office of the debtor and refuses to move until a payment is made. He and his raincoat generate such vile smells—they’ve been compared to the stench of a skunk and rotten eggs—that secretaries and customers gasp and flee the room. In practically all cases, he leaves with the payment.” As believers share Christ, it is life for some and death for others.

Contemplating the awesomeness of preaching the gospel, Paul asks, “**And who is sufficient for these things?**” (2:16b). Who is sufficient for the responsibility of preaching the gospel, which could be fatal to some who came in contact with it? Who is competent to proclaim a message resulting in eternal life and eternal death? (Hodge).

Paul explains the answer, “**For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ**” (2:17). Paul is sufficient because he is different than a religious huckster. The Greek word translated “peddling” means “to make a trade of.” Some traffic in religion for personal gain. To them, the word, that is, the gospel, is merchandise to be peddled for profit. This is the first reference in this epistle to false teachers and maybe a subtle reference to his opponents (Plummer).

Paul was sufficient because he was sincere, meaning pure in motive (Hodge). His motives were not mixed (Tasker). He was not selfish; he simply and sincerely wanted to serve. Yea, he could honestly say he was “of” God, meaning the source of his message was God. God was not only the source of his message but the witness of it as well. Paul spoke aware he was, in Christ, speaking in the very presence of God.

In short, his sufficiency was of God (2 Cor. 3:5). Those who preach mindful of money are not sufficient to handle the gospel. Only those who have godly sincerity are sufficient for the grave responsibility. We must be heralds, not hucksters, proclaimers, not peddlers, revealers of Christ, not retailers of religion.

**Summary:** Although concern for people can cause great anxiety, ministering Christ out of love and godly sincerity produces praise to God for the privilege of ministering.

Are there hucksters in ministry? Definitely! Some men are in it for the money. If they do not start that way, they end up that way. They become mindful of money instead of ministry. They go where the bucks are. They require a minimum, that is a maximum. There are also many genuine, godly men in the ministry. They love people and serve before God, not for gold.

Those who love others and lead godly lives will experience anxiety and feelings of insufficiency and at the same time, they will experience confidence and gratitude to God for the privilege of just being in the service of Christ. There are trials and triumphs in the ministry.

Earlier, I told of a couple I was to meet at 9:00 o’clock on Saturday morning. Shortly after 9:15, they showed up. They were late because of car trouble. More encouraging than the fact that they showed up was that they had done what I had asked them to for the first time. They had

gotten along well last week and were in great spirits. I was elated! Without ministry, there are trials and personal triumphs. With ministry, you experience God leading you in a triumphant processional. Share Christ and share His victory.

Guy King tells of waiting at a station for a train from London. While he was waiting, another train arrived and a soccer team got off the train. The people at the station waiting for the team didn't know if the team had won or lost. A small boy wiggled through the crowd, ran to one of the players and asked for the score. As soon as he heard it, he ran down the platform shouting, "We won! We won!" He spoke as if their victory was his victory. Serve the Lord. Share Christ. You will experience moments of anxiety, but God will lead you in triumph and you'll be shouting, "We won! We won!" (It was really "He won!")

## A MINISTER'S CREDENTIALS

Suppose you were on the search committee looking for a pastor for your church. Your job is to find a qualified man to minister to the congregation. How would you determine a particular man was fit for the job? In our culture, people put a stamp of approval on a man in the ministry in several ways. One is ordination; another is graduation from a theological institution. There is also a recommendation by letter.

My experience selecting pastoral staff is that ordination does not tell me much. Ordination signifies that a group of ministers examined the individual and concluded that he met the doctrinal qualification to minister in their denomination and that there was nothing glaringly wrong with him. Graduation from a theological institution means that the individual has some academic ability and probably has the same doctrinal position as the institution from which he graduated. I say “probably” because graduation does not guarantee doctrinal agreement. If a letter of recommendation means anything, it is that the subject of the letter is a friend of the author of the letter. If ordination, graduation, or a letter of recommendation does not clearly certify a man for the ministry, what does? What are valid ministerial credentials?

Suppose you are on the personal committee looking for Sunday school teachers, youth sponsors, or board members. How would you determine who is qualified? Is it desire? Someone's recommendation?

Paul once gave his ministerial credentials. Although he was ordained by the risen Christ Himself, he did not offer ordination as his seal of approval. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel, but he did not point to his academic achievements. He once sought letters of recommendation but did not submit one. What were Paul's ministerial credentials? What should be proper ministerial credentials today?

### Some do not Need Letters of Recommendation

*The First Question* Paul asked, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves?” (3:1a) The Greek word translated “commend” means “to present, introduce, demonstrate, “show.” Paul is asking if it is necessary to introduce himself to them again. That is, must he demonstrate his integrity and sincerity to them? Why does Paul ask that question here? Some commentators say that Paul had been charged with self-praise (Plummer; Hodge). Such a conclusion is not necessary (Tasker). He has just affirmed his sincerity and genuineness (2:17) and now asked if he really needs to demonstrate his genuineness to them.

*The Second Question* Paul adds, “Or, do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?” (3:1b) Some had used letters of recommendation. Perhaps the false apostles Paul mentions later (11:13) had come with letters of recommendation (Hodge). At any rate, Paul asked the Corinthians if he needed a letter of recommendation from them or to give one to them. Did Paul need a letter of recommendation to validate his ministry?

This question does not mean that letters of recommendation should not be used (Tasker). Paul himself followed the practice before his conversion (Acts 9:1-2) and after (1 Cor. 16:10 ff.; 2 Cor. 8:22 ff.; Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:10). Letters of commendation were a common custom in the ancient world. Yet, some ancients recognized that a man needed more than a letter of recommendation. Diogenes, the cynic philosopher, when asked for a letter of recommendation



said, “That you are a man he will know at a glance; but whether you are a good or a bad man he will discover if he has the skill to distinguish between good and bad, and if he is without that skill, he will not discover the facts even though I write to him thousands of times” (Barclay). The fact is that letters of recommendation have their place, but they are sometimes unnecessary and can be misleading. I received letters of recommendation that I later found did not contain the whole truth and were significantly misleading.

What then determines the qualifications of a man to minister to people? Graduation from a theological institution? Neither Charles Haddon Spurgeon nor Harry Ironside had any theological education, yet both were great preachers in great churches. A doctorate? Professors such as Wilbur Smith and F. F. Bruce never obtained an earned doctorate, yet they were both scholars who taught in theological seminaries.

## **People are Letters of Recommendation**

*A Personal Letter:* Paul did not need a recommendation letter because he already had one! He told the Corinthians, “You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men” (3:2). Paul’s letter of recommendation was the Corinthians. He needed no other testimonial, commendation, recommendation, or demonstration. Plato said that a good teacher should not write his message in ink that will fade or in words that cannot be spoken. Instead, he sows the seed of his message in the heart that understands. He writes his message upon men (Barclay).

Paul’s letter was not written on paper but on his heart! What does that mean? For something to be written on the heart can mean that it is a matter of conscience (Rom. 2:15; Heb. 8:10; Hodge). For someone to be “in our heart” is for that person to be dear and loved (7:3). Paul’s love for the Corinthians was written in his heart. Paul’s letter was in his heart, not in his briefcase. It was not an external document; it was internal. There was no danger of it being lost.

*A Public Letter* Furthermore, Paul’s letter of recommendation, written in his heart, was known and read by all. This was not a private letter; it was a public. It was not hidden in a drawer; it was an open letter read by all. Everyone knew Paul loved them. It was evident to all.

One thing qualifying a man for ministry is his love for people, which should be evident to all who know him. The ultimate issue is that a man’s qualification for ministry is his ministry! If he has a spiritual gift for ministry and has used it, there ought to be “success stories,” that is, people who have been genuinely ministered to by him. They are his letter of recommendation.

One of the lessons I have learned in being a senior pastor is that when I look for a person to be on the pastoral staff, I want someone who has a spiritual gift, but I also want someone who has demonstrated that gift by ministering to people. The letters that people write about a minister are not as important as the letters he has written on the hearts of people.

## **Believers are Christ’s Letter**

*Letters of Christ* Paul has one other point to make. He uses the same figure he just employed but changes it slightly. The Corinthians are pictured as a human letter. In terms of their relationship to Paul, they are his letter of recommendation (3:2), but in terms of their relationship to Christ, they are letters in his handwriting (3:3). Thus, Paul says, “You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (3:3). Christ wrote a letter (Plummer;

Hodge). The writing instrument was Paul, the ink was the Spirit of the living God, and the paper was the hearts of the individual Corinthians. Their salvation was the work of Christ through Paul by means of the Holy Spirit.

*Letters of Proof* Christ's letter is proof of Paul's ministry! The fact that they were converted to Christ through Paul demonstrates that the Spirit of God was working through him. This human letter was much greater than any letter of recommendation written with a pen, paper, and ink. Notice Paul contrasts this letter written on tablets of flesh with a letter written not on paper but on tablets of stone. He sets the stage for the next contrast he will make between the Old Covenant at Sinai and the New Covenant.

Graphology studies handwriting to analyze a person's personality and character. From the handwriting style, an expert can conclude whether a person is outgoing, withdrawn, independent, or conforming to the group. If believers in Jesus Christ are products of Christ's handwriting, one ought to be able to study them and determine things about Him.

**Summary:** Although letters of recommendation have their proper place, a minister's credentials are those he has successfully ministered to. Believers are Christ's letters and proof of someone's ministry.

A minister's credentials are changed lives. What would you look for in a minister if you were on a search committee? Degrees? Letters of recommendation? While they have their place, they are not the issue and could be misleading. Find people whose lives have been touched through his ministry.

This passage's other great spiritual truth is that all believers are Christ's credentials! Today, too many people are concerned about what kind of paper they are: a brown paper sack, ordinary bond, or expensive 25% cotton bond. The issue is not the type of paper but the message on it. On many occasions, I have outlined the gospel on a paper napkin in a restaurant. The person to whom I was witnessing has often asked for the napkin, not because of the "quality" of the paper, but because of the message on it. You and I are mere paper. The question is, do we contain the message of Christ that can be read by all who know us?

Some contain the message, but their letter is in a sealed envelope, or the letter is open, but there is a coffee cup stain on it. As believers, we should be an open letter with no stains so the message can be clearly read.

A new convert once testified that he had been saved by reading a copy of the fifth gospel. It was not Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, but it was the gospel, according to Mike, the butcher. Mike was a godly man whose testimony had been used of God to bring his friend to Jesus Christ.

An American minister visiting the Island of Taiwan heard a familiar tune of a gospel song drift through his open window. He looked outside to discover a parade of 20 to 30 people. Several of them were beating drums, all were singing and most wore strange white vests on which were painted words in large Chinese letters. He learned from a local Christian that these inscriptions were verses from the Scriptures. These people were headed for a park to conduct an open-air service. The minister remarked they were "Walking Bibles." We may not have Bible verses written on our clothes, but the truth is, if we are walking with Jesus Christ, we are walking Bibles.

We're the only Bibles this careless world will read.  
We're the sinner's gospel; we're the scoffer's creed.  
We're the Lord's last message given in deed and word.  
What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred.

## OUR GLORIOUS PRIVILEGE

One of the greatest privileges I've had is the opportunity to travel. I've been to all 50 States and the ten Canadian Provinces. I've seen most of Europe, including being behind the Iron Curtain. I've been to the Middle East, the Far East, and South America. I've driven the 1,500 miles of the Alcan Highway to Alaska and walked on a glacier, stared at the beauty of Niagara Falls, roamed Roman ruins, sailed the Greek Isles, crossed the Arabian Desert, sat on the sand in Hawaii, and straddled the equator in Ecuador. To someone who has not traveled a great deal, that sounds glamorous and glorious, and it is, but I've had the privilege to do something more glorious than all of that put together. If I had to, I would gladly give up all the glories of travel for something I consider much more glorious. You have this glorious privilege and you never have to leave home to experience it.

What is this glorious privilege, you ask? Paul had it and told us about it in 2 Corinthians 3:4-18.

### Our Sufficiency

*Not Ourselves* In 2 Corinthians 3:1-3, Paul expressed confidence that he needed no credentials other than the people to whom he had successfully ministered. Now, he clarifies, "And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as being from ourselves" (3:4-5a). Paul had confidence. The Greek word translated "trust" means "confidence." The confidence he speaks in this verse is his confidence in a triumphant ministry (see 2:14-17; 3:1-3; Hodge). It was through Christ and toward, or before, God (Phil. 4:19). Paul had confidence he could do the work of the ministry before God through Christ, who gave him the strength. That does not mean that he thought he was sufficient in himself. The point of the phrases "of ourselves" and "from ourselves" is that the source, either remotely or immediately of his sufficiency, was not of himself.

*From God* Rather than the source of our sufficiency being ourselves, "but our sufficiency is from God" (3:5b). The Greek word "sufficiency" means "adequate, fit, able, competent." His competence in ministry comes from God. The Greek work translated "sufficiency" was used repeatedly in the Greek translation of the Old Testament as one of the names of God. God is El-Shaddai, the Sufficient One (Ruth 1:20; 21; Job 21:15; 31:2; 39:32). Perhaps Paul had this divine name in mind (Plummer). Whether he did or not, our sufficiency is from the Sufficient One. Ability, adequacy, competence, and fitness for ministry come from God.

Allen Redpath, a former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, told the story of a man who bought a Rolls Royce and had it shipped to Africa. To register the car, he had to know how much horsepower it had. He wrote the Rolls Royce factory and asked, "What is the horsepower of my Rolls Royce?" The company sent a terse reply, "Concerning the Rolls Royce, horsepower adequate, whatever the driving needs." The God-called, God-empowered minister is sufficient for whatever the ministry needs.

Hudson Taylor once wrote, "How many Christians estimate difficulties in the light of their own resources and, thus, attempt little and often fail in the little they attempt? All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them." God's resources are always greater than our requirements.

Paul adds, “Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (3:6). God made us sufficient to conduct a New Covenant ministry. There are two different Greek words for new. One means new, primarily about time, young, and recent. The other one used here means new, primarily about quality, fresh, and unworn. This word always implies superiority to whatever was “old.” What is “new” is not just “recent,” which may be better or worse; it is definitely “better” as compared to something worn out and obsolete (Plummer). The usual Greek word for “covenant,” not used in verse 6, suggests a contract between two equal partners. However, the one rendered “covenant” here refers to a “last will and testament.” This word signifies an arrangement made by one party that another can either accept or reject but cannot alter (Moulton and Milligan). The “New Covenant” of which Paul speaks is the New Testament, not the obsolete Old Testament.

The New Testament is not of the letter but of the Spirit. The phrase “not of the letter but of the Spirit” does not mean “the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law,” like adultery versus lust. As is abundantly clear from what follows, Paul contrasts the Old Testament with the New Testament (see 3:7-11). The Old Testament was “of the letter” written on stone (3:7); the New Testament is “of the Spirit,” that is, by the Holy Spirit. There is also a suggested contrast between the Old Testament’s external nature compared to the New Testament’s internal nature (see Plummer; Hodge). Paul explains that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. The Old Testament Law written in stone kills because the penalty for breaking it is death and all break it (Plummer). On the other hand, the Spirit of God regenerates when one believes the gospel (see “living God” in verse 3).

A group of ministers at a conference gave testimonies about how they came to know the Lord. One pastor explained that he had been born into a Christian home and grown up in the church. “It seems from my earliest years I’ve always known and loved the Lord,” he said. The others remembered a definite time and place when they had come to Christ. The first minister quickly added, “But I do remember when the ‘have to’ became ‘want to.’” The Old Testament, the Law written in stone, demanded you have to. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit, working in the heart, produces “I want to” because I know the Lord. As someone has said, “Law keeps us limping in the dark; grace keeps us walking in the light.”

One commentator captured the essence of the thought well when he said, “A man may obey the written code while all the time he wishes to disobey it; but when the Spirit comes into his heart and controls it, not only does he not break the code, he does not even wish to break it, because he is a changed man” (Barclay).

## Our Ministry

Beginning in verse 7 and extending through verse 11, Paul contrasts the Old and New Testament ministries. Three contrasts are listed, each beginning with “if” (3:7, 9, 11). In contrast, the New Testament ministry is said to be “more glorious” than the Old Testament ministry (3:8, 9, 11).

*The First Contrast* “But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory has passed away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?” (3:7-8). The ministry of the Law, specifically the Law written and engraved on stones, the Ten Commandments, was glorious. Plummer says the written Law, as the basis of the Mosaic Law, is used here for the whole Law. The Greek word rendered

“glorious” means “bright, radiant, majestic splendor.” The glory of the ministry of the Law was evident on Moses’ face. So glorious was the bright, brilliant splendor that the children of Israel could not look directly on Moses’ face when he first came off the mountain. If the ministry of the Law was glorious, the ministry of the Spirit is “more glorious.” For one thing, the glory of the ministry of the Law “was passing away.” Apparently, the longer Moses was off the mountain, the more the glory faded, but more importantly, the ministry of the Law was “the ministry of death” (3:7). In comparison, the ministry of the Spirit (1:8) is a ministry of life (3:6).

If all a minister had to deliver was the Law, there is a sense in which he could be ministering glory. The Law was, after all, holy (Rom. 7:12). Yet, the ministry of the Law is also a ministry of death because no one can keep the Law and the penalty for breaking the Law is death. On the other hand, the one who ministers the Spirit ministers life.

*The Second Contrast* “For if the ministry of condemnation was glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels” (3:9-10). Again, the ministry of the Law had glory, but it was also a ministry of condemnation. The Law condemns those who do not perfectly keep it. If the ministry of the Law was glorious, the ministry of righteousness is more glorious. Instead of condemnation and death, the New Testament ministry produces life and righteousness. The sinner who trusts Christ is declared righteous (Plummer). That is more glorious than the ministry of the Law. In fact, the glory of the ministry of righteousness is so glorious it makes the glory of the ministry of the Law seem as if it had no glory at all (Plummer). “The Law, although glorious in itself, ceases to be glorious in the presence of the gospel, as the moon loses its brightness in the presence of the sun” (Hodge). The electric light in our house at night is glorious, but its glory diminishes as the sun rises in the morning to fill the house with brilliant light.

*The Third Contrast* “For if what is passing was glorious, what remains is much more glorious” (3:11). Finally, the ministry of the Law was glorious, but it is “passing away” (see verse 7). The New Testament ministry of life and righteousness “remains.” In short, the Law is transitory and temporary; the New Testament ministry is permanent (Hodge).

The New Testament ministry is more glorious than the old covenant ministry. It is superior. As Augustine said, “We do wrong to the Old Testament if we deny that it comes from the same just and good God as the New. On the other hand, we do wrong to the New Testament if we put the Old on a level with it” (Barclay).

## Our Speech

*The Old Testament Ministry* Paul concludes, “Therefore since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech” (3:12). Having hope that the New Testament ministry is more glorious and permanent than the Old Testament ministry of the Law, Paul used great boldness of speech. The Greek word translated “boldness of speech” means “freedom of speech, plainness of speech, frankness, outspokenness.” Instead of being timid, fearful, or reluctant, Paul was frank and courageous because of the expectations he had in his message (Hodge).

Paul again contrasts the ministry of Moses and the ministry of the gospel. “Unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly at the end of what was passing away” (3:13). Moses’ ministry was marked by concealment (Hodge). He put a veil over his face so the people could not see the glory fading away.

Paul adds, “But their minds were hardened. For until this day, the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this

day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart” (3:14-15). The veil on the face of Moses reminded Paul of another veil. As Moses’ veil concealed the fading glory of his ministry, so there is a veil concealing from Israel the fading away of the Old Testament. The Old Testament (3:14) refers to the Law of Moses (3:15; Plummer). Moreover, there is not only a veil over the Law but over the hearts of the people as well. Their minds are hardened; “their understanding is dull and deadened” (Hughes).

*The New Testament Ministry* Paul contrasts: “Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (3:16). Whenever Moses turned to the Lord in the Tabernacle, he took off the veil (Ex. 34:34). Likewise when anyone turns to the Lord today, the veil is taken away.

Abruptly Paul says, “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (3:17). This abrupt statement explains verse 16, turning to the Lord removes the veil because the Lord is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the giver of life (3:6). Moreover, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom, freedom from sin, death, condemnation of the Law (3:7-11), and freedom to speak with great boldness (3:12; Plummer; Hodge; Tasker). Having been freed from sin and death, Paul was uninhibited and free to discuss the New Testament ministry without restriction. Moses’ ministry was marked by concealment; New Testament ministry is characterized by liberty—there is nothing to hide.

Paul adds, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (3:18). Not merely ministers of the New Testament ministry, but all believers (Hodge) behold the glory of the Lord in the Scriptures and are transformed by the Spirit of the Lord into the same image from glory to glory. This is not a fading glory. It is an ever-growing and greater glory. It has also been unveiled, that is, on public display.

In the White Mountains of New Hampshire is a famous pass called Franconia Notch. High on one of the rocky walls protrudes a granite formation that resembles the profile of an old man looking over the valley. It is called “The Old Man of the Mountain.” Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a story based on that rock formation called “The Legend of the Great Stone Face.”

According to the story, a boy named Ernest lived in the valley beneath the great stone face. His mother told him about an ancient legend. She said, “Someday, a man will arise, born in this neighborhood whose countenance will resemble the great stone face you see on the side of that distant mountain.” As Ernest looked, he saw in the rock what appeared to be the features of a fine and noble man. From that time in his early years, he concentrated on that inspiring sight. He longed for the day when he could see a real face as kind and as wise as the one that appeared in the rock. Carefully he scrutinized individuals within the village, such as Mr. Gathergold, General Blood and Thunder, and the one called “The Poet.” Each time, however, he was disappointed, yet he never became discouraged in his search, cheerfully performing his daily duties and always seeking to help others. Over the years, he gained the respect and admiration of all who knew him. One evening, while he was speaking to a group of his neighbors, the setting sun lit up his countenance. Suddenly, the man called “The Poet” pointed to him and exclaimed, “Look, there’s the man who resembles the great stone face.” After looking at the image in the mountain and looking for an individual who bore that resemblance, Ernest became like the Great Stone Face. Whatever we look on with approval, we become like.

**Summary:** Since God Himself is our sufficiency, and the ministry He has given is glorious, we speak with great boldness.

Because we are part of the New Testament, our experience transforms (3:18) and we have God as our sufficiency (3:5). While those truths are in the passage, Paul’s major point is that

because we are part of the New Testament ministry, we speak with great freedom (3:12). What a glorious privilege! We can tell others about life and righteousness in Christ. I'd rather do that than all the other things in life that many consider glamorous and glorious.

Where would you want to go if it were possible to put you in a time warp machine and transport you to any event at any time in history? The landing on the moon? The signing of the Declaration of Independence at Independence Hall in Philadelphia? How would you like to have stood next to Martin Luther as he nailed his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenburg on October 31, 1516? Or would you rather have had a front-row seat in the ancient coliseum in Rome? How about watching the building of the pyramids of Egypt? Better yet, how would you like to have been with Moses as he went up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments? Now that would have been glorious! If you had such an experience, would you talk about it?

Well, as a believer in Jesus Christ, we have experienced the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That's our glorious experience. Our glorious privilege is to experience transformation, enjoy His sufficiency as we serve, and express this glorious message to others.

# THE PREVENTION OF DECEITFULNESS

Telling the truth can be dangerous! On more than one occasion, I have been caught in the middle of a dispute. Two people who disagreed with each other asked for my opinion. The first time that happened, I was happy to serve by helping to resolve the differences between two people. I learned the hard way it was not as easy as I thought. I even discovered that speaking the truth in love can be dangerous. They asked for my opinion of what was right. I gave it to them and one of them got angry with me!

Have you ever given the gospel to someone only to have that individual react negatively toward you! Have you ever told a believer what the Word of God said about something and have that person get upset with you? Paul asked the Galatians, “Have I, therefore, become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16).

If that is the case, why not hedge a bit? Why not pull punches? Why be totally truthful and not slightly deceitful? That’s a question every minister faces, and it is one every believer faces when giving the gospel to others. What prevents us from practicing, and what amounts to deceit?

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul discussed the New Testament ministry. In the first paragraph of chapter 4, he talks about what realizing that will do.

## Prevents Discouragement and Deceitfulness

*Discouragement* Drawing a conclusion from what has been said, Paul writes, “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart” (4:1). “This ministry” is the New Testament ministry (3:6), a ministry of the Spirit (3:6), of life (3:7), of righteousness (3:9). It is a glorious ministry (3:7-12) of liberty (3:17). God gave Paul this New Testament ministry (3:5-6) by His mercy (4:1). Paul did not achieve this ministry by his own human ability, but by divine mercy (1 Tim. 1:12-17 and 1 Cor. 7:25).

Having received such mercy and ministry, Paul did not “lose heart.” The verb rendered “lose heart” means “to become weary, tired, lose heart, despair” and refers to faintheartedness, which has been described as “the timidity that shrinks from coming forward and speaking out” (Plummer). It takes refuge in silence to escape criticism; it is the opposite of “great boldness of speech” (3:12; Plummer). No matter how difficult the task or how great the opposition was, having received God’s mercy to be a New Testament minister motivated Paul not to retreat to silence but to speak boldly (1 Thess. 2:1-12).

*Deceitfulness* Paul continues, “But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (4:2). Paul did not “lose heart” and thus keep silent (4:1). Rather he manifested the truth (4:2). Paul “renounced the hidden things of shame.” The word rendered “hidden” means “secret.” Paul repudiated any hidden or secret thing which would bring shame. He had “nothing to hide.” The next two phrases are, no doubt, examples of “hidden things of shame” (see Plummer; Hodge).

For example, Paul did not walk in “craftiness,” a word that means “cleverness or cunning.” It describes a willingness to do anything to gain an end. Hence, it includes the idea of unscrupulousness (Hodge). Apparently, Paul had been accused of being a “crafty trickster” (Hughes; see 12:16). Nor did he handle the “word of God deceitfully.” The phrase “word of



God” refers to the gospel (Plummer; Hodge). Paul claims he did not deceive anyone in any way in handling the message about Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is an allusion to the charge against Paul that he preached one gospel to the Jews and another to the Gentiles, deceiving the latter by not insisting that they keep the Law (Gal. 5:11).

What Paul did was manifest the truth. The term “truth,” like the phrase “word of God,” is a reference to the gospel (Plummer; Hodge). Paul did not hide the gospel; he made it known. He did not retreat into silence; he was outspoken. By manifesting the truth, Paul commended himself “to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” The truthfulness is self-evident to “every man’s conscience.” The Greek text reads, “to every conscience of man,” indicating every type of conscience (Plummer). His handling of the gospel satisfied whatever kind of conscience Paul encountered (3:1-3). Furthermore, beyond the conscience of man, Paul’s ministry commended itself “in the sight of God.” This is the climax. God Himself approved!

Thus, in the opening verses of chapter 4, Paul says that because he understood the nature of the New Testament ministry, he was not fainthearted or deceitful. Instead, he simply manifested the truth.

Jesus Christ is the Truth (Jn. 14:6). Paul’s argument in these opening verses is that knowing the truth, the gospel of Jesus Christ, motivates one to renounce lies and to tell the truth. “But that can be dangerous,” you say. No matter. Knowing Him who is truth makes me want to tell the truth, not a lie.

## **Provokes Preaching Christ and practicing Servanthood**

*The Gospel is Hidden* If Paul’s handling of the gospel commended itself to every type of conscience, does that mean that everyone who heard Paul acknowledged the truth of the gospel? No! Paul adds, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (4:3-4). Though the gospel is manifested, it is nevertheless hidden from some. The gospel is “veiled” to some. The word translated “veiled” means “to cover, conceal.” The gospel is hidden from some people. It is hidden from those who are perishing, lost, and headed for hell.

Their problem is two-fold. For one thing, the god of this age, Satan, has blinded their minds. Satan is the god of those who live in this age, for this age. Unbelievers live for what is present, the fad of the moment. Satan fills their eyes with this age and, thus, blinds them to the gospel. Blindness is their problem, not just badness.

The other problem is that they do not believe. Some say blindness causes unbelief (Hodge). Others contend that unbelief causes blindness (Plummer). Then, some claim that it is impossible to know from this verse which one is the cause and which is the effect (Tasker). At any rate, those perishing do not believe.

Were it not for Satanic blindness and personal unbelief, the light of the gospel would shine on them. After all, it is the light of the glory of Christ, not Moses or the Law (3:7-11), and Christ is the very image of God. He is the visible image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15; Jn. 1:18; 14:9).

The problem is not the gospel or the one who preaches it. The reason some are not saved is because they do not believe and because Satan has blinded their minds. A blind man fails to see the sun on a bright day at noon, not because of a problem with the sun but because he is blind! (Hodge).

I was invited to preach an evangelistic sermon in a small Hispanic congregation. In the sermon, I explained that since Christ died for our sins, we could be forgiven simply by trusting in Him. To illustrate that Christ died for us to pay for our sins, I told an imaginary story of me getting a ticket and having someone else pay for it. At the conclusion of the sermon, I invited people to trust Christ and raise their hands if they had. Among others, an elderly gentleman lifted his hand.

Sometime later, two men from that church visited the elderly gentleman. In a conversation about salvation, the older man explained that he thought one had to do good works to go to heaven. He said it was just like Mike said: you must help people. I used an imaginary illustration of someone helping me to illustrate what Christ had done for us. That gentleman was blind to what I was saying. He concluded that the way to be saved was to help people! What blindness!

*The Gospel is Preached* Paul further explains (“for”), “For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake” (4:5). In verse 4, Paul said that the message of the gospel concerned the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. In verse 5, he said he preached Christ Jesus the Lord. The word “Lord” here means “God” (Hodge). Paul preached that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, the Savior, who alone can save the perishing.

What Paul and others did not do was preach themselves. Paul says we are “your servants for Jesus’ sake.” The Greek word translated “servants” is the word for “slave.” Elsewhere, Paul called himself a slave of God (Rom. 1:1) and of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1), but this is the only place where he speaks of being the slave of men (Plummer). He was their slave for “Jesus’ sake.” “Jesus” is the human name of the second member of the Trinity. As a man, he took the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7). Paul had the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). He was their slave for Jesus’ sake.

Earlier, Paul told the Corinthians not to become the slaves of men (2 Cor. 7:23). Now, he says he is their slave (2 Cor. 4:5). Did Paul not practice what he wrote? There is no contradiction between the two statements. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul taught them not to let a man be their master *apart from Christ*. There is only one absolute ultimate Master, Jesus Christ. Here, he is merely saying that he was their slave *for Jesus’ sake*. By saying he was their slave, he did not mean they were his master. Christ was his Master and because Christ was his Master and he was Christ’s slave, he served the Corinthians.

Thus, Paul preached Christ the Lord and did not lord it over his converts. He was not the master, only a minister. He was not their savior, only their servant.

Why did Paul and his associates preach Christ as God and become slaves? Paul explains, “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). In the Greek text, “for” is the Greek word “because.” This verse explains the previous statement (Plummer; Hodges). Paul and the others preached Christ as God and became slaves to Him and others because they had received divine revelation of who Christ is.

Originally, darkness covered the earth (Gen. 1:2). God commanded the light to shine (Gen. 1:3). Paul used the creation story as an illustration of conversion (Hodge). Darkness covers the minds of men. God “turns on” the light (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus Christ is the light of the world (Jn. 1:4, 5, 8, 9; 8:12; 9:5). At conversion, men “see” the light. Perhaps there is also an allusion to Paul’s conversion on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3).

Men in unbelief are blinded by Satan (4:4). They stumble in the darkness, not knowing where they come from, where they are, or where they are going. Then, as God at the dawn of creation dispelled the darkness by saying, “Let there be light,” the light of Jesus Christ shines on the

minds of men. They “see” the glory of God in Jesus Christ. He is the image of God (4:4). As a result, they know where they came from, where they are, and where they are going. Having had that experience, Paul preached Christ Jesus the Lord and practiced servanthood for Christ’s sake.

There is a sense in which the two halves of this brief paragraph could be organized around the Person of Christ. He is the Truth (4:1-2) and He is the Light (4:3-6). Knowing Him makes me want to tell the truth, not a lie, and let the light shine, not hide it.

**Summary:** Realizing the nature of the New Testament ministry prevents discouragement and deceitfulness and provokes one to preach Christ and practice servanthood.

Why do we tell the truth? Why do we not practice deceit? Why do we preach Christ? Why do we serve others? The answer to these questions is because we have understood who Jesus Christ is. We know that He is God in the flesh. He is the truth. He is the Light. He is the only Savior: understanding that prevents discouragement and promotes gospel preaching and the practice of servanthood.

Dannecker, the German sculptor, spent eight years producing a sculpture of the face of Christ. It was said that his sculpture blended love and sorrow into the face of Christ so that beholders wept when they looked upon it. Subsequently, he was asked if he would use his incredible talent on a statue of Venus, the Greek goddess. He replied, “After gazing so long into the face of Christ, think you that I could now turn my attention to a heathen goddess?”

Having seen the glory of Jesus Christ, how could we possibly want to practice deception?

# THE PURPOSE OF PRESSURE

When I was growing up, my mother used a “pressure cooker.” She would put vegetables, potatoes, and meat in a pot with a lid. The lid was designed so that it did not just fit loosely on the pot but tightly. Then, she put the pot on the stove. Because the pressure cooker was a sealed system, the heat under the pot created pressure, so the food was cooked under pressure. I can remember her letting off the pressure before she opened the pot.

Life is like that. People often feel that they are in a pressure cooker. (The modern word is stress.) Contemporary American life is filled with pressure: the pressure to get to work in a gridlock of traffic, the pressure to produce more and more at work, and the pressure to relate at home. Many frequently have other pressures put upon them, such as financial pressure, a conflict in a relationship, a physical illness, or the death of a family member or friend. In those moments, the believer in Christ asks, “Why does God allow this to happen to me?”

There is pressure not only in life in general but also in the service of the Lord. Like any “work,” there is pressure to produce and like others, the man in the ministry encounters financial problems, conflicts with others, physical illness, and bereavement. Added to that is the pressure from opposition, criticism, and persecution. When that happens, the minister asks, “What is the purpose of this pressure? I certainly don’t need it!” Paul answers that question in 2 Corinthians 4.

## The Treasure of Christ is in an Earthen Vessel

*The Placement of the Treasure* Paul declares, “For we have this treasure in an earthen vessel, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (4:7). Paul imagines himself and all believers as mere earthen vessels, that is, clay pots! Like clay pots, we are weak and frail. Paul was described as weak in bodily presence and having contemptible speech (10:10). He agrees he is nothing more than a clay pot.

This clay pot, however, contains a treasure (4:7). The treasure is the divine revelation mentioned in verse 6, namely “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (Plummer). That priceless treasure is in an earthen vessel, a mere clay pot! Gold and silver were carried in earthen vessels in the Roman triumphal procession. Plutarch described the celebration of the Macedonian victory of Aemilius Paulus in 167 BC. Seven hundred and fifty earthen vessels, each containing three talents of silver coins, were carried by three thousand men. It took four men to carry each vessel (Hughes). Likewise, the precious, priceless knowledge of Jesus Christ is contained in earthen vessels like Paul.

*The Purpose of the Placement* The purpose for God putting such valuable treasure in such a lowly vessel was so that it would be apparent that the incredible power of the gospel is of God, not of the vessel. Tasker well says, “It is as though a most costly jewel were encased in an earthenware jar! Paul sees in this a supreme manifestation of the divine law that God’s strength is made perfect in human weakness (cf. XII: 9). This striking paradox makes it clear that the gospel is no product of human ingenuity, no clever discovery of the human intellect, no bright idea of some outstanding genius, but a revelation of the power of the Sovereign God.”

Someone has said, “The meanness of the earthen vessel which conveys to others the gospel takes nothing from the value of the treasure. A dying hand may sign a deed of incalculable value; a shepherd boy may point out the way to a philosopher; a beggar may be the bearer of valuable

presents.” The priceless Dead Sea Scrolls, found by a young Bedouin boy, were preserved throughout the centuries in a fragile clay pot.

## The Vessel Constantly Experiences Difficulty

*Pressured* The vessel, which contains exceeding valuable treasure, experiences difficulties. These difficulties are now described in a series of couplets. For example, Paul says, “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed” (4:8a). The Greek verb rendered “hard-pressed” means “to press, oppress, distress.” It is translated “afflicted” in 2 Corinthians 1:6. This pressure is described as being “on every side.” The Greek text says “in all things” and means either “from all sides” or “on every occasion.” Paul felt constant pressure (see “always” in 4:10) from every side. The current word to describe this experience is stress. In the Greek text, this identical expression here translated “hard-pressed on every side” occurs in 2 Corinthians 7:5, where it is rendered “troubled on every side.” In chapter 7, Paul describes his experience in Macedonia. He says his flesh had no rest; he was troubled on every side: “Outside were conflicts, inside were fears” (7:5). Even though Paul was pressured from without and from within, he was not “crushed.” The Greek verb translated “crushed” comes from two nouns: “narrow” and “space.” Paul is saying he was pressured from every side yet was not compressed into a narrow space to the point that he was crushed. He was not in “hopeless straits” (Plummer).

Thus, the picture shows an antagonist pressing in upon him, yet he still has room to move. He is pressed for room but still has room (Hodge). He is hemmed in on every side but not completely restricted (Tasker).

*Perplexed* That is not all, “we are perplexed, but not in despair” (4:8b). The Greek word rendered “perplexed” comes from the two words “no” and “way or resource.” It means to be at a loss. People are perplexed when they see “no way out.” Yet, Paul could say he is “not in despair.” Like the Greek word for “perplexed,” the Greek word rendered “despair” comes from a root that means “no way,” only “despair” contains a prefix, making the word mean “to be utterly at a loss.” There is a play on words here. Paul is “at a loss,” but not “utterly at a loss.” He is despondent but not in despair. He did not know what to do, but he was confident that it would end well (Plummer). He was at the end of his resources but not at the end of God’s resources.

*Persecuted* There is more: “persecuted, but not forsaken” (4:9a). The picture behind the word “persecuted” is being pursued by someone determined to hurt or harm in some way. Paul is being hunted like a sportsman looking for a wild animal. Throughout his ministry, Paul was repeatedly hated, hunted, and hounded. Yet, he knew he was not forsaken. This does not refer to his friends and fellow workers. Because, like Christ, Paul experienced being forsaken by those close to him. Even at the end of his life, when he needed them the most, he was forsaken by them (2 Tim. 4:10, 16). Therefore, he must mean that when pursued and persecuted by his foes and deserted by his friends, he was not forsaken by the Lord (Heb. 13:5; Plummer; Hodge). The Lord did not personally leave him or leave him to his own resources.

*Pushed Down* The difficulty can get worse: “struck down, but not destroyed” (4:9b). Paul was not only pursued, but his antagonist also caught him and cast him to the ground. On at least one occasion, this happened. Hostile Jews from Antioch and Iconium pursued him to Lystra, stoned him, dragged his body out of the city, and left him on the ground for dead (Acts 14:19). He was struck down, but he was not destroyed; he was not killed. When it seemed that he was on his deathbed, God raised him up (Acts 14:20). We may be knocked down, but we’re never knocked out. Walking with the Lord is a mountain climb, not an escalator ride. There may be

those moments when we are “knocked down,” but we are not TKOd. When hemmed in on all sides, the way up is still open.

*Possibility of Death* Paul not only faced difficulties, he constantly faced death! He adds, “always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (4:10-11). The expression “carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus” in verse 10 is explained in verse 11 (see “for,” as being “delivered to death for Jesus’ sake”). In other words, because of his service for Christ, Paul constantly faced death (Plummer). Twice in these two verses he uses the word “always” (see 1 Cor. 15:30; Rom. 8:36; 2 Cor. 11:23). Paul knew well the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings in which he was conformable to his death (Phil. 3:10-11). Facing death was a daily experience.

Although not stated in verses 10 and 11, Paul was repeatedly delivered. He was “not destroyed” (4:9). God had a purpose in permitting him to always face destruction only to be delivered. The purpose was “that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body” (4:10; see also, “that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh” in verse 11). In verse 10, Paul says the life of Christ was manifested in his body. In verse 11, he changes “body” to “flesh” to highlight his weakness and frailty (Hodge). God allowed Paul to face difficulty and possibly death so that He could deliver him. Thus, God’s power was demonstrated in Paul’s near-death experiences (4:7). Paul’s deliverances demonstrated Jesus was alive (1:8-10; Plummer; Hodge).

## **The Experiences are for others and the Glory of God**

*The Good of Others* Paul concludes: “So then death is working in us, but life in you” (4:12). In the Greek text, “the” appears before death. The death Paul has in mind is the one mentioned in verses 9 and 10, mainly his repeated brush with physical death in the service of Jesus Christ (Plummer; Hodge). Paul’s experience of death and deliverance was life for the Corinthians. Had he not been willing to risk death and bring them the gospel, they would not have had it and, therefore, life (Tasker). Furthermore, his continuing afflictions were for the benefit of their spiritual life (1:3-11). Paul could say that all the things he experienced were for their sake (4:15).

He could have been silent, but he was not. He explains why he was outspoken. “But since we have this same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak” (4:13). Paul quotes Psalm 116:10, claiming he had the same attitude of faith as the Psalmist. When the Psalmist faced trouble, sorrow, and death, he did not despair; his faith did not fail. He was confident that the Lord would deliver him. So, he called on the Lord and proclaimed His praises. Because of his confidence in the Lord, Paul spoke.

Paul’s faith was grounded and founded upon a God of resurrection power. He says, “knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will present us with you” (4:14). Paul continued to speak and face death because he believed God would resurrect the dead. After all, He resurrected Jesus Christ. If He could do that, He could deliver Paul. And if Paul should not be delivered, God would one day resurrect him because he was in Christ (Hodge). Furthermore, He would also raise and present as a bride to the bridegroom Paul’s converts (Tasker). Christians are indestructible! Paul’s faith in the God of resurrection power motivated him to face difficulties, danger, and death for Christ’s sake. The result was that death was working in him, but that meant life for others to whom he ministered.

Men working on Boulder Dam lost their lives in accidents. When the project was complete, a plaque was established with the names of the workers who had died. Below their names, the

plaque reads, “These died that the great desert might rejoice and blossom as the rose (Barclay). Paul was willing to go through all of his difficulties and hardship so that others might experience the life of Christ so that that desert might blossom as a rose.

*The Glory of God* Paul further explains, “For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God” (4:15). All the things that happened to Paul (4:8-11) were for the good of others and the glory of God. The latter part of verse 15 has been called obscure (Plummer). The two most common explanations are: 1) The more who come to know God’s grace through Paul’s gospel preaching, the more who will thank God for God’s glory (Tasker). 2) Many prayed for God’s grace to abound toward Paul; when it did, they thanked God for His glory (1:11; Phil. 1:19; see Hodge). Whichever interpretation is correct (the first seems to fit this context better, but the second fits with 1:11), the point is Paul’s trouble was a means God used to produce thanksgiving in others. Thus, Paul’s problems were for God’s glory.

**Summary:** God put the great treasure of the knowledge of His Son in an earthen vessel and let that vessel experience constant difficulties and even face death for the good of others and, ultimately, for God’s glory.

When we experience pressure, we ask, “Why?” We are usually looking at ourselves and only ourselves. The concept of this passage broadens our perspective. Instead of focusing on ourselves, Paul would have us see the good of others and the glory of God. If when the pressure comes, we trust the Lord (1:9) and manifest the truth, that is, the gospel (4:7), as we face difficulties (4:8-9) and even death itself (4:10-11), the excellence of the power is of God (4:7), and the life of Christ is demonstrated (4:10-11). In other words, we are delivered (or resurrected, 4:14), and others hear the gospel and experience life in Christ. Perhaps the best illustration of what Paul is teaching here is something he experienced later in his life. In Philippians chapter 1, he says he was determined that Christ would be magnified in his body whether he lived or died (Phil. 1:20). At the time, he was in prison, facing possible death. Yet, because he was determined to preach Christ, the palace guard had heard the gospel (Phil. 1:12-13). As guards were stationed to watch Paul, he led them to Christ one at a time!

Have you experienced the pressure cooker of life? As a potato, were you determined that Christ would be magnified, no matter the pressure? If so, you could experience the God-intended purpose of pressure, which is to demonstrate that even though we are weak, He is strong, that even though we are a mere clay pot, we contain the excellence of the knowledge of Christ.

Pressed out of measure and pressed to all length,  
Pressed so intensely it seems beyond strength;  
Pressed in the body and pressed in the soul,  
Pressed in the mind till the dark surges roll;  
Pressure by foes, and pressure by friends,  
Pressure on pressure, till life nearly ends,  
Pressed into loving the staff and the rod,  
Pressed into knowing no helper but God;  
Pressed into liberty where nothing clings,  
Pressed into faith for impossible things;  
Pressed into living a life in the Lord,  
Pressed into living a Christ-life out-poured!

Walter B. Knight

# THE PREVENTION OF DISCOURAGEMENT

As I got off the plane, I was greeted by the pastor of the church in which I was to speak that week. It was obvious that he was glad to see me. As we walked toward the baggage claim area, we chatted about some things that had happened since we had last seen each other and some of the prospects for the coming week. We continued our conversation as we claimed my luggage and drove to the motel. After he left me at the motel that night, I remember thinking all seemed well. It was not until several days later, when he and I had an opportunity to go to lunch that he poured his heart out to me. I learned all was not well. While he appeared to be encouraged on the outside, he was deeply discouraged on the inside.

Discouragement in the ministry is common. Some might go so far as to say that it is at epidemic proportions among many in the ministry today. I've personally encountered it with pastors on many occasions. Consequently, I have asked myself, what is the solution to discouragement? Or better yet, how do you prevent discouragement among pastors and all Christian workers? Board members are growing weary of the grind and want to resign. The lack of response discouraged Sunday school teachers who want to quit teaching. Feeling overloaded, church workers at every level want to sit rather than serve. How does one prevent discouragement in service? The Apostle Paul gave why he was not discouraged in 2 Corinthians 4.

## The Conclusion: Discouragement is Preventable

*The Conclusion* Paul begins this paragraph with the conclusion. “Therefore we do not lose heart” (4:16a). The word “therefore” indicates that this is a conclusion from what has been said. Paul has stated that God will raise us up with Jesus (4:14). Now he concludes, we do not lose heart.

*The Contrast* In verse 1, Paul said the same thing. Although the same Greek word “lose heart” is used in both places, the two statements have a slightly different emphases. In verse 1, faintheartedness is the opposite of “great boldness of speech” (3:12). Thus, in verse 1, the point is we do not lose heart; we speak. In the context of verse 16, however, the contrast is simple discouragement because of the pressure encountered in service (4:8-10). So, in verse 16, the point is we do not lose heart; we continue to serve. In other words, as a result of losing heart, one may cease to speak (4:1) or cease to serve (4:16). Paul was determined to do neither.

What prevents discouragement? In verse 1, Paul says that having received the New Covenant ministry, we do not lose heart. In verse 16, he says we do not lose heart because of our future hope (4:14, 16-18). In light of the prospects of both the present and the future, we do not get discouraged. It is the prospects of the future Paul now develops.

## The Case for Our Hope

*Inward Renewal* To explain how he did not lose heart, Paul pins, “Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (4:16b). The “outward man” is the body (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker), called in this passage “the earthen vessel” (4:7), “the



body” (4:10), “mortal flesh” (4:11), “earthly house” (5:1), and “tent” (5:1). This outside shell is in the process of perishing. The afflictions (4:17) Paul encountered (4:8-10) contribute to the perishing process. Those pressures afflicted his physical frame. On the other hand, the inward man, the person inside the body, is being renewed daily. Although the external is decaying and dying, the internal does not lose heart but is renewed, reenergized, and revitalized. How does that happen? How can the inner man be renewed when the outward man is dying? How can the process of perishing and renewal go on in the same person simultaneously? What does the believer have to do to experience the renewal? Paul explains in the next verse (Plummer).

*The External Reward* Paul says, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (4:17). The afflictions contributing to the perishing of the outward man are themselves working to bring eternal glory to us. The Greek word translated “working” means to “produce, achieve, accomplish.” Afflictions produce glory (Plummer; Tasker). If we suffer with Him, we will be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 1:7). Hughes emphatically argues that this verse does not teach rewards are acquired through suffering. Kruse, however, says there is a connection between affliction endured and glory to be experienced. The text clearly states that “affliction is working (that is, producing) glory. The key is the word “working.” Furthermore, the glory produced is out of proportion to the affliction (Kruse). By comparison, the affliction is light and temporary, but the glory is heavy and eternal. We think of our trials as heavy and long-lasting. Compared to what we gain if we respond correctly, they are lightweight and short-lived.

A French pastor comforted an afflicted woman by saying: “Dear sister in Christ, notice that I hold in my hand two stones. They are alike in color and are equally pure. Yet, there’s a marked contrast between them. One has a dazzling brilliance; the other is quite dull.” “What makes the difference?” inquired the woman. “Any dealer in precious stones could give you the answer,” said her pastor. “It’s because one has received eighty cuts from the jeweler’s chisel and the other only eight! The stone that has ‘suffered much’ is radiant, but the one that has had little effort expended on it is dim and lusterless.” He reminded the lady that her light affliction, which was only temporary, was working for her an “eternal weight of glory.”

What does the believer do to obtain renewal now and reward later? The remainder of the sentence, begun in verse 17, answers that question. “While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (4:18a). To not lose heart and to be renewed, believers must not look at that which is seen; they must look at that which is not seen. The Greek verb translated “look” means “to keep one’s eyes on, consider, contemplate.” The noun form of this Greek word means “goal” (Phil. 3:14). This looking is more than a mere momentary glance; it is fixing one’s gaze upon, concentrating one’s attention on (Hodge), considering the unseen and making it the goal. What is the unseen?”

Paul explains, “For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (4:18b). The Greek word rendered “temporary” means “in season, temporary, transient, short-lived.” The things seen, which in this passage includes affliction (4:17), last only a time. Things not seen, that is, glory/rewards, are eternal. In other words, as we make that which is not seen, eternal rewards, our goal, we are renewed. We faint not; we fight on because we know this is soon over and we will be rewarded throughout all eternity for persevering now.

This verse teaches several great truths. One year at an Oakland, California tennis match. Hanna Mandlikova stopped Martina Navratilova’s winning streak at 54 games. The next year, she defeated top-seeded Chris Everett Lloyd. After that match, Hanna was asked how she felt about winning. She responded, “Any big win means that all the suffering, practice, and travel are

worth it. I feel like I won the world.” When asked how long the feeling lasts, she said, “About two minutes.” The gains of this life are temporary.

The temporariness of life also applies to suffering. A missionary conducting meetings in a small village asked Christians to share their favorite passage with the group. Most quoted salvation verses, but one elderly man stood to his feet and said that his favorite words in the Bible were “It came to pass.” He explained that when sickness came, it encouraged him to know that it would pass and that when trouble came, he knew it wouldn’t last forever.

The other great truth in this passage is that as we respond correctly to affliction, we will get a far greater glory in heaven later. Focusing on what we will gain later instead of what we are suffering now would certainly prevent discouragement.

## The Case: Our Future House

*Believers Know* In 2 Corinthians 5:1, Paul begins to explain in more detail what he has said in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (see “for”). “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (5:1). The human body is now called an earthly house, a tent. Our bodies, like a tent, are transitory. The Greek word translated “destroyed” means “dismantle, demolish, destroy.” At death, our bodies are like a dismantled tent, a demolished house; they are destroyed. Notice that Paul does not say “when” but “if” when we die. Physical death for the believer is not a certainty, only a possibility. The rapture may prevent the folding of our tent (see Plummer). Nevertheless, if death should come, we know by revelation that we have a home in heaven.

The believer’s future abode is described as “a building from God” and as “a house not made with hands.” Man will not erect that building; it will proceed from God. It will not be materials made with hands; it will be spiritual. “Not made with hands” is “almost a technical term for that which is heavenly and spiritual in contradistinction to what is earthly and spiritual” (Hughes). That building will not be temporary as a tent but eternal.

There are three interpretations of “a building from God, a house not made with hands:” 1) Heaven (Hodge and Tasker). The problem with that view is that “house” in the first part of verse 1 refers to the body and it is most natural to understand “house” in the latter part of verse 1 as a body. 2) The resurrected body (Kruse). 3) An intermediate body. Chafer says, “Apart from the divine provision of an intermediate body, the believer’s desire that he should not be clothed or bodiless could not be satisfied” (Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. IV, p. 415). The second of these three views is the correct one. Verse 1 says that this new abode is eternal. Therefore, it cannot refer to an intermediate body. Thus, the resurrected body is in view.

Barclay comments, “He (Paul) is not looking for a nirvana with the peace of extinction; he is not looking for absorption in the divine; he is not looking for the freedom of a disembodied spirit; he is waiting for the day God will give him a new body, a spiritual body, in which he will still be able, even in the heavenly places to serve and adore God.”

*Believers Groan* We not only know we have a house in heaven, but we also groan for it (in the Greek text “and” appears before “for” at the beginning of verse 2; Hodge). Thus, Paul adds, “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven” (5:2). Although the metaphor is mixed (see clothed with a building), the point is clear (Plummer). The realization of our habitation in heaven makes us groan. The Greek word rendered “groan” means “to sigh.” It denotes an “internal and unexpressed” feeling (Mayor,

James, p. 167). Knowing we have a divinely constructed eternal spiritual dwelling causes us to earnestly desire to be clothed with that habitation from heaven (see Tasker).

The next verse sounds strange. “If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked” (5:3). How can one be found naked after he is clothed? The usual explanation of this verse is that having put on the heavenly clothes, that is, the spiritual body, we shall not be found naked, that is, in a disembodied state (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker). The verse, however, does not refer to a disembodied person without a body. It plainly says, “having been clothed,” as is evident from the context, means having been clothed with a heavenly body. Paul seems to be contemplating the possibility of being in heaven with a naked heavenly body. How can that be?

While this possibility might sound strange to an evangelical ear in modern America, it is not foreign to the New Testament. Jesus said, “Behold I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Rev. 16:15). In other words, this is another way the New Testament talks about the subject of rewards (*NKJV Study Bible*). As we endure, we weave a garment with which we will be clothed, so to speak, in eternity. If we do nothing, we will be there in a resurrected body that is unclothed, that is, naked. If we faithfully serve the Lord, we weave a garment to clothe our resurrected bodies. Obviously, this is figurative language. The point is that Paul was looking forward to his resurrected body and the reward he would receive in the future.

Verse 4 begins with “for” indicating it explains something previously stated. It explains what was said in verse 2 (Plummer; Hodge): “For we who are in the tent groan being burdened not because we want to be unclothed but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life” (5:4). We groan earnestly desiring our habitation in heaven (5:2), because being burdened in our present body we long for that future state (5:4; Hodge). It is not that we want to be unclothed in this body; it is that we want this mortal body to be swallowed up by our heavenly habitation. It is not that we just desire to be delivered from suffering or to be delivered from death. We deeply desire to be moved into our heavenly home (Plummer). This future experience is called “life.” It is the full experience of our spiritual life in Christ.

*Believers are Confident* Paul adds, “Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (5:5). God has prepared us for this future glory and has given us the Holy Spirit as a down payment. We have the deposit with guarantees of the full and final payment later.

When we moved from Arcadia to Glendora, we purchased a house but could not move into it immediately. Several things had to be done to the house before we took up residence there. During those long months before we occupied the house, we longed and groaned to be in the house. The experience of believers is to know that they have a future glorified body waiting for them and they are groaning and longing to be in it.

Richard DeHaan, the son of the famous Bible teacher M. R. DeHaan, once said, “I shall never forget what my father said shortly before he left us for his home in glory. Having experienced some pain in his chest, he was hospitalized so that he might have complete rest and also be in a place where he could be kept under close observation. One morning, while I was visiting with him, he got a faraway look in his eyes and said with the sincerity of voice that millions of listeners to the Radio Bible grew to love, ‘Richard, sometimes my curiosity gets the best of me. I get so eager to see what’s on the other side.’”

Paul now concludes. “Therefore, we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord” (5:6). Because we have God’s guarantee (5:5), we are confident (5:6). The Greek word translated “confident” means “to be of good cheer or courage, to be confident.” This confidence is always present. When pressed, perplexed, and

persecuted (4:8-9), when confronted by discouragement, danger, and even death (4:10, 11, 16; 5:1), we are confident we shall be in heaven (Hodge). This confidence is not dependent on outward circumstances or inward mood.

We know that while we are at home here in our mortal body, we are absent from the Lord Himself (5:6). We also know that when we leave this home, we will be present with the Lord (5:8). Until now, Paul has spoken about having a building, a house in heaven (5:1) and having life (5:4). Now he speaks of being in the presence of Christ.

How can a believer be so confident? How do we know? Paul parenthetically explains (Hodge), **“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (5:7)**. The Greek word rendered “sight” means “that which is seen, external form, appearance.” We do not live by appearance. Christ is not now bodily present. We live by faith in Him, who is not seen.

Having interpreted the thought of verse 6 to make the assertion about faith in verse 7, Paul now resumes where he left off saying (Plummer), **“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (5:8)**. Again, the point is to be present in body is to absent with the Lord (5:6) and to absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (5:8). In verse 8, Paul repeats “we are confident” (see 4:6) and adds “well pleased.” The Greek word translated “well pleased” means “to think it good, take pleasure.” Paul was not only confident that he was going to be with the Lord, but he was also pleased with the very thought of it. He was willing to accept the worst—death—with confidence and consent because he knew that would mean being in the presence of the Lord.

John B. McFerrin, a noted preacher in the South, was lying on his deathbed. His son, who was also in the ministry, spent as much time as possible by his father’s side. One Saturday, he felt it necessary to leave his father to preach in another city. Aware of his father’s serious condition, he was hesitant to leave. Sensing his son’s reluctance, the father encouraged him to go, saying, “Son, you better get started. Don’t worry about me. I’m feeling better today, but if I should slip away while you’re gone, you’ll know where to find me.”

Christians never say goodbye for the last time.

*Be Ambitious* Paul draws another conclusion, this time from the fact that he is confident that he will be with the Lord. **“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him” (5:9)**. Desiring to be with Him produces the desire to please Him (Hodge). The Greek word rendered “aim” is a compound word from “love” and “honor.” The root meaning of the word is “to love or seek honor,” hence, it came to mean “to be ambitious, to make it one’s aim.” Paul’s aim and ambition, no matter where he was, whether in the body or out, was to be pleasing to the Lord. He desired that honor come from Him.

Paul explains, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (5:10)**. The reason for aiming to please Him is not only because we will be with Him (5:8) but all believers are accountable to Him and will be evaluated by Him (5:10). The Greek word translated “appear” means “to make visible, clear, known, manifest.” Here, it could refer to nothing more than an appearance, like appearing in court before a judge. Or it could mean we must stand revealed in our true character (Hodge). In fact, Hughes says, “To be made manifest means not just to appear, but to be laid bare, stripped of every outward facade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one’s character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secret, intimate sins of thought and deed, will be open to the scrutiny of Christ” (Hughes; 1 Cor. 4:5; Heb. 4:13).

The phrase “judgment seat” translates from a single Greek word, “bema,” which refers to a platform or tribunal on which the seat of a presiding officer was placed (Plummer). In the Roman

Empire, the Magistrate sat on such a raised platform to administer justice (Hodge). The bema itself produced reverence and fear in people.

The purpose of our appearance is that each one may receive the things done in the body. We will not be judged in mass or by class but one by one (Plummer). The word translated “received” means “to receive back, to get what is one’s own, to get an equivalent, to get one’s due.” Each one will be given exactly what is due him, whether what he did was good or bad. The believer will either be approved or ashamed (5:3; 1 Jn. 2:28). The believer’s entire life will be judged.

As Hughes says, “The judgment pronounced is not a declaration of doom, but an assessment of worth, with the assignment of rewards to those who because of their faithfulness deserve them, and the loss or withholding of rewards in the case of those who do not deserve them. Plummer says, ‘done’ is in the aorist tense, meaning the individual’s whole life is viewed as a unit. He adds that “good or bad” is in the neuter, indicating not acts done none by one, but our actions as a group are being considered” (Hughes, fn., p. 181).

The story is about a brilliant young concert pianist performing for the first time. The audience sat enthralled by the marvelous music that poured forth from his disciplined fingers. As the final note faded, the audience burst into applause. Virtually everyone in the audience gave the young man a standing ovation. Everyone there, except one old man in the front. The pianist walked off the stage with his head hung low. When the stage manager praised his performance, the young man said, “I was no good; it was a failure.” Surprised, the manager replied, “Look out there; everyone except that old man is on their feet.” “Yes,” said the young man, “but that old man is my teacher.” The one person above all the pianist wanted to please was his mentor. In a similar fashion, the one person we should all want to please above everyone else is our Savior.

**Summary:** Discouragement is preventable by making eternal reward your aim. The sure hope that present suffering leads to eternal glory enables one to bear all things in the suffering of Christ (Hughes).

Throughout this passage, Paul makes critical statements like we do not lose heart (4:16), we do not look (4:18), we know (5:1), we groan (5:2), we are confident (5:6, 8), and we make it our aim (5:9). These statements are related and, when rearranged, form the essence of the message. Consider: We know (5:1), we groan (5:2), we are confident (5:6, 8), we make it our aim (5:9), we don’t look at the seen and the present (4:18), we look at the unseen and the eternal (4:18). Therefore, we do not lose heart (4:16).

Robert Louis Stevenson tells of an older man who worked in a cow barn. Someone asked him how he could go on day in and day out. The man responded, “He that has something beyond need is never weary.” According to the Apostle Paul, the great truth that prevented discouragement from the yuck and muck of this life was that there is something beyond awaiting us.

Henry David Thoreau said, “Read not the times, read the eternities.”

## MOTIVES FOR SERVICE

A missionary in Africa was once asked if he liked his work. His response was shocking. He said, “No, my wife and I do not like dirt. We have reasonably refined sensibilities. We do not like crawling into vile huts through goat refuse.” Upon hearing that, you might naturally ask, “Then why does he do it?” That brings up the question of motives for service. Why do you do what you do for the Lord? Why *should* we do what we do for Jesus Christ? In 2 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul tells what motivated him to serve the Lord.

### The Fear of the Lord

*Persuade You* In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul declared that all believers will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ so that they may receive their due for all they did in their lifetime, whether it was good or bad. Based on that, he concludes (Plummer; Hodges), “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (5:11a). The “terror of the Lord” is the fear of standing before the Lord and having one’s life “exposed and estimated” (Plummer). Barclay says, “This does not describe the fear of a dog, who waits for a whipping, or the fear of a cowed and beaten child. It is that reverence that keeps even a thoughtless man from desecrating a holy place. It is that fear which keeps a man from doing things which would break the heart of someone whom he loves.”

The reality of giving an account to the Lord motivated Paul to “persuade men.” “Persuade men” has been interpreted as warning unbelievers of the coming judgment. Still, this statement is not based (see “therefore”) on unbelievers being judged. Still, on believers being judged (see 5:10), Paul is speaking of the need to convince some of the Corinthian Christians of his sincerity and integrity (Plummer; Hodges).

The second half of verse 11 explains the statement, “We persuade men.” It says, “but (Greek: “and”) we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences” (5:11b). The Greek word that is translated “well known” here twice is the same word that was rendered “appear” in verse 10. It means “to make visible.” Paul is saying as he has been open to God’s view, he hopes he is open to their view (4:2).”

Hodge explains, “Although misunderstood and defamed by others, he trusted that the Corinthian Christians as a body had an inward conviction of his integrity. The evidence of his sincerity was his moral excellence, and therefore it addressed itself to their conscience. There may be many reports against a good man which we cannot contradict; many charges which we cannot refute; and yet the self-evidencing light of goodness will produce the conviction of his integrity and the conscience even of wicked men, and much more in the hearts of the good.”

*Answer Others* Any claim to integrity can be used against the person making the claim. With that in mind, Paul explains (“for”), “For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to glory on our behalf, that you may have something to answer those who glory in appearance and not in heart” (5:12). Paul did not claim sincerity and integrity for himself and his companions to win the approval of the Corinthians again (3:1; Hodge). Instead, he is giving them an opportunity. The word Greek rendered “opportunity” means “a place to start, a base of operation.” His statement about integrity was to be a base of operation to answer those who glory

in outward appearance and not in the internal of the heart, such as the false apostle in their midst (see 11:18).

This refers to Paul's opponents, who accused him of self-glory (Plummer). He would deal with this later. For now, he is giving the Corinthians ammunition to refute his adversaries. They can boast for him. Calvin comments, "We are taught here that Christ's servants ought to be concerned for their own reputation only insofar as it is for the advantage of the church" and "that in the ultimate issue, a minister's pure praise is that which is common to him with the whole church, rather than particular to him alone" (Calvin, cited by Hodge).

Paul has told the Corinthians to glory on his behalf (5:12). They had grounds to glory. As Paul goes on to explain, "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of a sound mind, it is for you" (5:13). Paul contemplates being in two states or conditions. First, he says, "If we are beside ourselves." That has been interpreted to mean in a state of ecstasy (Plummer, Tasker) or to be an extremist engaged in hardship and hazard beyond all reason (Hughes). Second Corinthians 11:1, 16 and the following support the latter view. Paul "went to extremes" for God's glory. Second, he says, "If we are of a sound mind, it is for you." This refers to his ministry to the Corinthians. When teaching, he was sane, sober, and of a sound mind for their sake.

The point is Paul did what he did for the glory of God and the good of others, not for his own glory (Hodge). Therefore, the Corinthians could justly defend him and his ministry. Paul did not live for himself.

While visiting India, a newspaper reporter met a missionary nurse who lived among the lepers to minister to them. He noticed how tender and loving she was with them. Looking at her in amazement, the reporter commented, "I wouldn't wash those wounds for a million dollars." "Neither would I," said the missionary. "But I gladly do it for my Savior. The only reward I'm looking for is His smile of approval."

## The Love of Christ

*Constrains Us* Paul now explains why he didn't live for himself but for God's glory and others' good, and in the process, he develops another motive for doing so. He writes, "For the love of Christ constrains us because we judge this: that if one died for all, then all died" (5:14). The phrase "The love of Christ" can either mean 1) Christ's love for us or 2) our love for Christ. In this verse, Paul definitely means Christ's love for us, as the latter part of the verse clearly indicates (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker; cf. "because one died for all"). Christ demonstrated His love for us by dying for us (Rom. 5:8). Christ's love constrains us. The Greek word rendered "constrains" means "to hold fast, to shut-in." The love of Christ in dying for us shuts us up to the conclusion that if He died for all believers, all for whom He died also died. His death was our death (Plummer). We died in Him (for an extended discussion of "for" meaning substitution, see Hughes; also Hodge).

Christ's death not only means our death, it also means something concerning our life. Paul continues "and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (5:15). The purpose of His death for us (see "that") was that we should not live for ourselves but for Christ.

The concept taught in 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 15 is fully developed in Romans 6:1-14. The believer in Christ has been spiritually baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. He has died

and been raised. Paul's point here is that the purpose of it all is that believers are not to live a self-centered, self-seeking life but to live a Christ-centered, Christ-serving life.

Charles T. Studd was born into a wealthy British family in 1862. He became an outstanding cricket player at Cambridge University. In his third year, he was converted at a Moody-Sankey meeting and dedicated his life to Christ. He announced he was giving away his personal fortune, leaving the world of sports, and becoming a missionary to China. Studd served Hudson Taylor's mission for nine years until poor health forced him to return to England in 1894. A few years later, he began plans for a mission to Africa. He left for Africa in 1910 and, in 1919, established the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade. He explained his motives: "If Jesus Christ be God and He died for me, then no sacrifice that I make can be too great for Him."

*Informs Us* In verses 16 and 17, Paul mentions two results of Christ's death for us and our death with Him. "Therefore from now on we regard no one according to the flesh even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer" (5:16). The Greek word translated "therefore" in this verse is not the usual word rendered "therefore." This one describes "result" rather than a conclusion. The issue in this verse is the meaning of the phrase "according to the flesh." One commentator lists seven views of it (Plummer). This phrase does not mean that Paul had contact with Christ during His earthly ministry. While that may or may not be a possibility, it is immaterial. Paul's point is that before his conversion, he judged Christ "according to the flesh," that is, by fleshly perspective or by external standards such as outward appearance (see "who glory in appearance" in 5:12), race, or social status (Hodge). Tasker suggests that prior to his conversion, Paul judged that it was impossible that one born in such obscurity, living in such restricted circumstances, and dying such a humiliating death could be Christ. Meeting Christ on the Damascus Road changed all that. Paul no longer judges Christ by fleshly perspectives or by external standards.

Nor does he now regard anyone according to the flesh. Having come to Christ not only changed his view of Christ; it changed his view of everyone else! He no longer judges others by outward appearance. As a Jew, he judged everyone, especially non-Jews, according to his prejudice. Christ changed all of that.

It has been suggested that Paul's apostolic authority had been challenged at Corinth because he failed to follow Christ during His earthly ministry (Hughes).

The next verse begins with "therefore," but like verse 16, the word "therefore" here describes a result. This is the second result of Christ's death for us and our death with Him (5:14 and 15). "Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (5:17). Paul has been using the pronoun "we," which is primarily him and his co-workers (1:1; 2:13, 14; 3:1; 4:1, 8, 16 and esp. 5:9, 11, 12, 13, 16), but no doubt also includes all believers (5:14-15). Now he says, "If anyone." First Corinthians 5:17 definitely consists of all who are in Christ.

"In Christ," a favorite Pauline expression, sums up what was said earlier (5:14-15). All in Christ have died with Christ and have been raised with Christ. In short, such people are "new creations"; they have been born again. God has created a new person. Hughes says this new creation is a "reborn microcosm belonging to the eschatological macrocosm of the new heavens and the new earth." Because those in Christ are new creatures, old things have passed away. The old way of regarding others according to the flesh has passed away for those in Christ who realize what that means (5:16; Plummer). Unfortunately, some in Christ don't (Jas. 2:1-13). The old way of living for ourselves (5:15) should also be passed away.



With “spontaneous jubilation” (Hughes), Paul says, “Behold!” For the person in Christ, all things have become new. There should now be a new perception of others (5:16) and now the possibility to serve Christ (5:15) and others (5:13) for the glory of God (5:13).

Louis Sherry Chafer said 33 things happened to people when they trusted Christ. D. L. Moody’s list, which he wrote in the fly-leaf of his Bible, contained seven. “Justification: a change of standing before God. Regeneration: a change of nature from God. Repentance: a change of mind about God. Conversion: a change of life for God. Adoption: a change of family in God. Sanctification: a change of service unto God. Glorification: a change of place with God.” As a new creature, I speak with a new tongue and sing a new song.

*Gives Us a Ministry* God has made us new creatures in Christ and He has given us the ministry of reconciliation. The word “us” includes all in Christ (5:17; Hodge). This concept is now developed in verses 18-21. Paul begins this discussion by saying, “Now all things are of God. He who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ Jesus and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (5:18). All things are of God. God made us new creatures (5:17) by reconciling us to Himself. The backdrop of reconciliation is the alienation between God and the human race. Humans have rebelled against God; they have thus become God’s enemy. God’s response to their rebellion is wrath (Rom. 1:18). Through Christ, God has reconciled rebellious, alienated people to Himself and has given those reconciled a ministry of reconciliation. The Greek word translated “reconciled” means “to change.” It changes the relationship between people from enmity to friendship.

Paul now explains how God reconciled us to Himself through Christ “that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (5:19). The first part of verse 19 can be translated as either 1) God was in Christ reconciling the world, that is, in reconciling the world to Himself God not only acted through Christ, (5:18) He was in Christ (Calvin; Luther; 5:19) or 2) in Christ God was reconciling, that is God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ (Plummer; Hodge; 5:18). The second view is preferable. God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ by not imputing their trespasses to them. The word translated “imputing” means “to count, to reckon.” God could change His relationship with the world because He did not reckon their sins to them. This is explained in verse 21. God reconciled the world to Himself and committed to us the word, which is also the message of reconciliation. Our ministry of reconciliation (5:18) is to deliver the message of reconciliation to the world.

From the fact of God’s commitment of this ministry to us, Paul draws a conclusion: “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading with us: we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf be reconciled to God” (5:20). An ambassador is more than a messenger; he is a representative of the sovereign who sent him (Plummer; Hodge). As ambassadors for Christ, we implore people (“you” is in italics, indicating it is not in the Greek text; Hughes), be reconciled to God. As ambassadors for Christ implore people on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God, it is as if God Himself were pleading with them. Notice that Paul says God gave us the word of reconciliation, not the work of reconciliation. We are wholly incompetent in the work of reconciliation.

People should be reconciled to God “for He made Him who know no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (5:21). Provision has been made for reconciliation. It is through Christ Jesus (5:18) that God does not impute trespasses to the world (5:19). It is because God made Christ, who was without sin, to be sin for us. The sinless Son of God did not become a sinner nor just a sin offering; He became sin for us.

The purpose (see “that”) of Christ becoming sin for us is that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. When a sinner trusts Christ who died for him, in his place, he is declared righteous, that is, justified. Christ took our sin on Him on the cross and we got His righteousness when we trusted Him. Thus, we are reconciled to God.

M. R. DeHaan tells of a friend of his named Clarence who mailed a check to the Radio Bible Class. He said the check was no good. He explained it was made out on the right bank, the amount was properly written, and the date was valid. However, Clarence neglected to sign his name. DeHaan sent the check back with a brief note, “My dear Clarence: an unsigned letter we will excuse, but an unsigned check we cannot use. Sincerely yours by grace.” In due time, the check returned and was signed correctly, but as DeHaan further explained, it was still no good until he signed it. It takes two signatures to make a check good: the giver and the receiver. Likewise, for us to be reconciled to God, Christ had to die and we must trust Him.

**Summary:** The proper motives for genuine service are the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ. In other words, we serve Him and others because of our relationship to the Lord.

While interviewing young people who volunteered for missionary service, Hudson Taylor asked, “Why do you wish to go as a foreign missionary?” One replied, “I want to reach others across the sea because Christ has commissioned us to go into the entire world and preach to gospel to every creature.” Another said, “I want to go because millions are dying without having heard of Jesus, the only one who can save them.” Others gave similar answers. Hudson Taylor looked at them thoughtfully for a moment and said, “All of your motives are good, but I fear they will fail you in times of severe testing and tribulation, especially if you are confronted with the possibility of facing death for your testimony. The only motive that will enable you to remain true is 2 Corinthians 5:14—Christ’s love constraining you will keep you faithful in every situation.”

At the beginning of this message, I told of a missionary who said he didn’t like his work because he didn’t like crawling into vile huts through goat refuse. There was more to his answer. He said, “But is a man to do nothing for Christ he does not like? God pity him if not. Liking or disliking has nothing to do with it. We have orders to ‘go’ and we go. Love constrains us.”

# GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

Someone, I forgot who and when, gave me a card with a single sentence elaborately printed on it. The sentence was one of those quotable quotes, one of those sentence sermons. I'd seen it before, but I didn't think much about it. I filed it in a pile of other collectibles on my desk. Sometime later, I began working on 2 Corinthians 6:1-10. During the study, I came across that card with a notable statement on it and thought to myself, that's what Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 6. The statement read, "God gives us all great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations." What are the "great opportunities?" What are the "impossible situations?" Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 6:1-10. The backdrop of this passage is the charges against Paul (1:12-13; 5:13).

## Give No Offence

*Paul's Plea* Paul says, "We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (6:1). As an ambassador for Christ, Paul implores sinners to be reconciled to God (5:20). Now he says as a worker together with Him, he pleads with the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, God is said to plead. Here, Paul pleads (the same word that is translated "implore" in 5:20). God and Paul work together in the ministry to sinners (5:20) and saints (6:1).

The translation and punctuation of the English text of 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 obscure the grammatical structure of the Greek text. In the Greek text, the verb of verse 1, "plead," is modified by three participles: working together (6:1), giving offense (6:3), and commending ourselves (6:4). Thus, verse 2 is a parenthetical statement. Paul makes a plea in this paragraph (6:1-2) and describes in detail his manner of ministry (6:3-10). He develops the plea in the next paragraph (6:11 ff.).

The Greek word rendered "vain" means "fruitless" or "to no purpose." One commentator suggests the rendering "to no profit" (Plummer). How does one receive the grace of God in vain? Some say it means to receive the gospel but not be reconciled to God through it because of unbelief (Hodge; Tasker). Others claim this refers to genuinely accepting God's grace and forfeiting it by a relapse into sin (Clarke). Neither of these interpretations fit the context of the passage or the New Testament. This statement is addressed to the Corinthians, who were believers (1:2). In fact, in the Greek text, "you" is emphatic (6:1). Once people genuinely receive the grace of God, they are sealed (1:22) and cannot come into judgment (Jn. 5:24). The most natural way to understand this statement that it is possible to be reconciled to God and be fruitless. If believers live for themselves, they will be fruitless (5:15).

Hughes suggests that Paul has the Judgment Seat of Christ in mind (5:10). He says, "The explanation which in our judgment is most satisfactory, and which seems best to fit the broad context in which this verse is found is that Paul is here thinking in terms of the Judgment Seat of Christ, before which the works of every Christian will be made manifest (5:10)... For them to receive the grace of God in vain meant that their practice did not measure up to their profession as Christians, that their lives were so inconsistent as to constitute a denial of the logical implications of the gospel, namely, and in particular, that Christ died for them so that they might no longer live to themselves but to His glory."

Paul explains, “For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (6:2). Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 and applies it to his readers. His point is that in an acceptable time and on the day of salvation, God hears and helps. For the Corinthians, now is such a time. They should not receive the grace of God in vain because God is ready to hear and to help them.

*Paul’s Purpose* Paul now describes his manner of ministry: “We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed” (6:3). The Greek word translated “offense” means “an occasion of stumbling” and denotes that which causes others to stumble (Plummer). Paul did not give people an occasion to stumble over his ministry. The purpose of giving no offense was that the ministry be not blamed. The word “blamed” means “to find fault with” and often implies mocking and ridicule. The noun form of this verb was the name of the Greek god of mockery and ridicule (Hughes). This word may also include the idea of being a laughing stock. Paul’s ministry and message were about reconciliation (5:18-19). To cause others to stumble would be inconsistent with his ministry. As Barclay has pointed out, “A man’s message will always be heard in the context of his character. That is why the preacher and the teacher must be beyond suspicion.”

## Commend Yourselves

*Endure Suffering* Paul gave no offense, “but in all things, we commend ourselves as ministers of God” (6:4). In every respect, in all he did, and in all that had happened to him, he did that which demonstrated that he was a minister of God. In the remainder of the paragraph, he mentions some of these things. The list can be divided into three groups: 1) his sufferings (4b-5), 2) his conduct (6-7a), 3) his paradoxical experiences (7b-10).

The first part of this list includes: “In much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings” (6:4b-5). After “in much patience,” this list consists of three triplets, indicating that the “much patience” was demonstrated in three triplets of specific situations (Plummer). Two Greek words in the New Testament are translated “patience.” The one that occurs in 2 Corinthians 6:4 means “patient enduring” (Hodge) and is best translated “endurance.” Paul exhibited “much endurance.”

Paul exhibited endurance “in tribulation, in needs, in distresses.” The word “tribulation” means “pressure.” The word “needs” means “necessities” and here refers to a hardship that cannot be avoided. The Greek word translated “distresses” means “straits, narrowness of space.” Tasker says it implies “no room to turn around and nothing but frustration”). Hughes suggests “situations of utter perplexity in which Christ’s servant is faced with difficulties which, humanly speaking, appear to be insolvable.” Paul endured pressure, necessities, and utter perplexities.

He also exhibited endurance “in stripes, imprisonments, tumults.” Later in this letter, Paul says he experienced “stripes above measure” (11:23) and adds, “From the Jews five times I received 40 stripes minus one, three times I was beaten with rods” (11:24-25). He also says he was “in prisons more frequently” (11:23). The only imprisonment recorded in Acts before this was written was at Philippi (see Acts 16). The Greek word translated “tumults” means “instability, disorder,” and here refers to political uprisings. Paul experienced many of these (Acts 13:50; 14:5, 19; 16:22; 17:5; 18:12; 19:23-41; etc.). He endured beatings, imprisonments, and political uprisings.

Moreover, he exhibited endurance “in labors, sleeplessness, fastings.” The Greek word translated “labor” refers to labor to the point of weariness. Hughes says a suitable translation would be “fatigues.” Sleeplessness does not mean insomnia; instead, it means voluntarily going without sleep to spend more time in ministry (Plummer). He says he did that “often” (11:27). Likewise, “fastings” do not refer to a formal religious fast but voluntarily going without food to get more done (Plummer). He did that often (11:27). Paul endured weariness, sleeplessness, and lack of food.

His suffering demonstrated his endurance and his sincerity. Why else would he endure such hardship? These trials authenticated his ministry. He commended himself for enduring suffering.

The ministry is hard work. An ad for job openings in a youth conservation program stated that the work would include “exposure to heat, humidity, rain, mud, millions of biting mosquitos, poison plants, barbed wire, and hard work.” Being in the ministry is tough stuff.

*Exhibit Godliness* The second part of Paul’s long list consists of: “By endurance, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the Word of Truth, by the power of God” (6:6-7a). This part of the list describes Paul’s godly conduct, which in context he is arguing commended him as a minister of God. “By purity” (Greek: “in” purity) includes purity in motive and conduct, a “clean heart and clean hands” (Plummer). “By knowledge” (Greek: “in” knowledge) refers to knowledge of God and His Word. “By longsuffering” (Greek; “in” longsuffering). He means patience with people (see comment on 6:4). Plummer says that “patience” (6:4) is courage and fortitude which endures adversity without murmuring or losing heart, whereas “longsuffering” (6:6) is enduring injuries and evil deeds without being provoked to anger (Jas. 1:19) or vengeance (see Rom. 12:19). “By kindness” (Greek: “in” kindness) is meant a disposition of good (Hodge) or goodness in action (Tasker). “By the Holy Spirit” (Greek: “in” the Holy Spirit) Paul indicates the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in his graces (Gal. 5:21-23; Hodge). “By sincere love” (Greek; “in” sincere love”) Paul means an unhypocritical love (Rom. 12:9; 1 Pet. 1:22). “By the Word of Truth” (Greek: “in” the Word of Truth) Paul refers to his preaching of the gospel. “Word” means “speech” and the phrase “the Word of Truth” refers to the preaching of the gospel (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; Jas. 1:18; Tasker). “By the power of God” (Greek: “in” the power of God) Paul means the power of God manifested in his preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 2:3 ff.).

*Experience Paradoxes* The third and final part of Paul’s long list says, “By the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet truth, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and behold we live, as chastened and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things” (6:7b-10). These paradoxical experiences also commended him. At this point in the long list, Paul changes the preposition which appears at the beginning of each phrase. Until now, he used a Greek preposition, which should be translated “in” (6:4-7a), although it was rendered “by” in verses 6-7a. Beginning with the phrase “by the armor of righteousness,” Paul changes to a preposition that could be translated “through,” although it, too, is rendered “by” (6:7b-8a). Later, he will switch to “as” again next time (6:8b-10). These changes were made because of the shift in meaning and for the purpose of style (see Plummer).

The Greek word rendered “armor” actually means “weapons.” Paul’s weapons are not carnal (10:4), but he uses weapons of righteousness on every side. The shield was carried on the left arm and the sword was held in the right hand (Plummer). In offense and defense, Paul used weapons of righteousness (Tasker).

Paul maintained his integrity through “honor” and “dishonor” (Hodge). Some honored him; others dishonored him. His conduct commended itself through it all. This was true through “evil report and good report.” The Greek word translated “evil report” means slanderous, defamation, while “good report” refers to praise or a good reputation. “Honor and dishonor” was what he went through in person. “Evil report and good report” were the rumors about him. Tyndale explains, “Sometimes the apostle’s reputation in the eyes of men stands high; sometimes he is reckoned a person of no account and treated with disrespect. He is defamed and is praised; he is slandered, and he is honored; he is criticized, and he is flattered. But whatever men’s estimate of him may be, he continues, undaunted, to “fight the good fight of faith” (Tasker).

The next two couplets describe things said about him. He was considered a deceiver by some and as a true man of God by others. Hughes reminds us, “It has always been the work of Satan and his servants to attempt to overthrow the truth of God by calling it falsehood” (Hughes). Paul was treated as a deceiver, that is, a false teacher as well as a true teacher, but no matter the opinion of others, he was faithful to his calling. He was treated “as unknown yet well known” (6:9). Some said, “I’ve never heard of him” (Tasker); others considered him famous (Hodge).

From his point of view, his experiences were “as dying and behold we live” (6:9), that is, he was constantly exposed to danger that could be fatal, yet he was always delivered, so he lives! (4:10-11). He was “as chastened, and yet not killed,” that is, he viewed these experiences as a part of his discipline. Life in the service of Christ was difficult and dangerous, but for Paul, it was just part of the discipline and, after all, he was not killed; he was still alive.

Consequently, he was “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (6:10). The Greek word rendered “sorrowful” means being distressed, grieved, and pained. His life was filled with grief and pain, but his heart was filled with joy. He was “as poor, yet making many rich” (6:10). He was personally financially poor, but he made others spiritually rich, so he was “as having nothing yet possessing all things” (6:10). This is a fitting climax and conclusion. In one sense, Paul had nothing—no family, home, or possessions- yet he possessed all things (1 Cor. 3:21 ff.).

In these paradoxical experiences, Paul commended himself as God’s servant. Life swings from one extreme to another. The object is to keep your balance and perspective. As Kipling said,

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or, being lied about, don’t deal in lies,  
Or being hated don’t give way to hating,  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same:  
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,

**Summary:** Throughout his experiences, Paul conducted himself to give no offense and commend himself to others.

You will face impossible situations, especially if you serve the Lord, pressure (6:2), perplexities (6:4), labor to the point of weariness (6:5), dishonor (6:8), evil report (6:8), poverty (6:10), and maybe even jail (6:5). You, like Paul, will be accused of doing what you’re doing for

selfish reasons. These impossible situations are great opportunities to conduct yourself as a servant of God.

George Fox relates what happened to him at Tick Hill. “I found the priest and most of the chief of the parish together in the chancel. So I went up to them and began to speak, but immediately they fell upon me; the clerk took up the Bible as I was speaking and struck me on the face with it so that it gushed out with blood, and I bled exceedingly in the steeple-house. Then the people cried, “Let us have him out of the Church,” and when they had got me out, they beat me exceedingly, and threw me down, and over a hedge; and afterward they dragged me through a house into the street, stoning, and beating me as they drew me along so that I was besmeared all over with blood and dirt.... Yet when I was got upon my legs again, I declared to them the word of life and showed them the fruit of their teachers, how they dishonored Christianity” (Fox, cited by Barclay).

## YOUR “SPIRITUAL” AFFILIATION

If you are on one mailing list, you are on more than one. If you're interested in photography and order something from one company, you will somehow get on every other photography company's mailing list. That can be helpful. It can also be aggravating. They all know your address if you sign up to help one religious organization. That's not only aggravating; it can also be deadly. Because of a job transfer, you move to another city. Once settled in your new house, you seek a new church. Fortunately, a dozen churches are within driving distance of your new home. That can be helpful. It can also be dangerous. How can receiving religious mail and visiting different churches be deadly? “Religious mail” can be more lethal than a letter bomb and a church can be more deadly than a poison pill. Your so-called “spiritual” affiliations are vitally important to your spiritual life. Let me explain.

Paul established a church at Corinth and left town. After his departure, a small group of false apostles came to the church (11:12-15). They questioned his integrity and sincerity (1:12) because he did not return as promised (1:15-17, 1:23-2:4), because of what they said happened to the brother he told the Corinthians to discipline (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 7:8-12), and no doubt because of his money-raising (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 7:2; 2 Cor. 8-9). These accusations at least raised questions in their minds, and perhaps they began to, emotionally at least, withdraw from Paul.

Paul speaks to some of these specific issues (1:12-2:11) and about the ministry in general (2:12-6:10). Now he writes directly concerning his relationship with them and their relationship to him (6:11-7:4). The subject is “religious” affiliations.

### Be Open to Saints

*Paul has been Open* Addressing his readers directly, Paul says, “O, Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open” (6:11). Only rarely does Paul address his readers by name. He only does it on two other occasions (Gal. 3:1; Phil. 4:15). When he does it, he expresses strong feelings. Paul has spoken openly, that is, freely, to them. He told them plainly why he didn't come as promised to Corinth (1:17, 23; 2:1-2). He told them of his love for them (2:4) and his anguish because of them (2:4, 12-13). He spoke candidly about the discipline problem (2:5-11). He wrote clearly concerning his ministry (3:1-5; 4:2), his motives (5:9-16), and how he conducted himself (6:1-10). He was particularly forthright about what he had been through in the ministry (6:4-10). Paul's open, free speech came from an open heart. He did not close them out of his heart; he opened his heart to them, and there was plenty of room for them in it.

*The Corinthians have been Closed* Furthermore, Paul adds, “You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections” (6:12). The Greek word translated “restricted” is a compound word made up of the words for “narrow” and “space.” It means “to cramp, confine.” A narrow space is one with no room. Paul says his heart is not closed, so there is no room for them, and he thus restricts them. Hughes captures the thought: “Paul's heart was not narrowed or pinched by suspicions and misconceptions of the Corinthians. Though he knew their feelings and though their attitude to him had been marked by a deplorable lack of generosity, yet his love for them remained unaffected; there was no question of their being squeezed out of his heart.”



The problem was *their* afflictions were restricted. Their heart was too narrow for Paul. There was no room in their heart for him. The suspicions planted by Paul's enemies filled their hearts so that there was no room for Paul.

These two verses contain a figure of an open (6:11) and closed (6:12) heart to convey that there was no lack of love on Paul's part, but there was on their part.

*Be Open* Paul pleads, "Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open" (6:13). The word rendered "return" means "requital" and conveys the idea of an exact equivalent. Paul is pleading for the exact equivalent he gave them. He gave them an open heart (6:11) and asked them for the same in return (6:13). In asking for an open heart, he speaks to them as children. He led them to Christ and, therefore, was their spiritual father (1 Cor. 4:15). It is only natural and normal for a child to return the same affection to the father he gave. He is saying, "I am speaking to my children" (Plummer).

### **Don't be Unequally Yoked**

*The Command* Abruptly, Paul commands, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (6:14a). Verse 14 seems to be an interruption of the appeal in verses 11-13 (see 7:2) and an introduction of an irrelevant warning. Why does Paul say this here and what does he mean by "unequally yoked?" Evidently, the Corinthians were shutting Paul out of their hearts (6:11-13) and letting others, unbelievers, in to the point of being yoked together with them (6:14). Earlier in the chapter, Paul had pleaded with them not to receive the grace of God in vain (6:1). Perhaps, this injunction is an elaboration on that concept (Hughes connects 6:1 with 6:14). If they yoked up with unbelievers and not with Paul or other believers like him, they would receive the grace of God in vain.

The metaphor of "unequally yoked" is of two different animals working side by side under the same yoke. For example, Moses said, "You shall not plow with an ox or a donkey together" (Deut. 22:10). Thus, to be unequally yoked refers to a believer (6:14) and an unbeliever (6:15) being bound together in a working relationship.

*The Reason* The reason for not being unequally yoked is "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? and what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (6:14b-16a). With a series of rhetorical questions, Paul explains that a believer should not be yoked with an unbeliever because the two are complete opposites. Righteousness and lawlessness have no fellowship. They are antithetical. Thus, they have no fellowship. The Greek word translated "fellowship" means "sharing, participating in, partner, companion." Believers and unbelievers have no companionship, no comradeship. Light and darkness have no communion. They are incongruous. Thus, they have no communion, a Greek word that means "close relationship, association, communion." Believers and unbelievers have no close relationship, no communion. Christ and Belial have no accord. Belial is another name for Satan (Plummer). Christ and Satan are complete opposites. Hence, there is no accord, that is, agreement. Believers and unbelievers have no accord, no consent. Believers and unbelievers have no part with each other. They are different and distinct. The Greek word rendered "part" means "portion" or "share." Believers and unbelievers do not have a common whole to be shared together. They have no common whole, no common ground. The Temple of God and idols have no agreement. They are radically different. Idols are dead; God is living (6:16). Therefore, they

have no agreement with each other. Believers and unbelievers have no concurrence, no collaboration.

The last rhetorical question is further explained, “For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (6:16b). The Greek text “you” is emphatic. The Greek word translated “temple” was the word for the innermost part of the temple, the place where God dwelt. Believers are indeed the very temple of the living God. God, Himself said so. Paul is referring to Leviticus 26:11-12 as well as, perhaps, other passages like Jeremiah 32:38 and Ezekiel 37:27. Believers are the temple of God individually and collectively. God lives in them and walks among them. Therefore, they should not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. Believers and unbelievers are incongruous and incompatible.

When I was in seminary, I preached in a small hamlet in Oklahoma called Buckhorn. To get there, I traveled by car miles from any paved roads, on dirt roads, and across swinging bridges. Buckhorn had no stores, no telephones, and only about 40 residents. They did, however, have a one-room schoolhouse with one teacher who taught 8 grades to 13 pupils. On Sunday, we used the one-room schoolhouse to conduct a church service. One Sunday, I was preaching about being separated from the world and used the illustration of the yoking of an ox and a horse. I then said, “You wouldn’t yoke an ox with a horse together, would you?” A blind man in the congregation, Mr. Turner, who attended every Sunday, interrupted the sermon by saying, “No, pastor, because they don’t have the same nature.” That is exactly what Paul is teaching in this passage. Christians are not to be yoked with an unbeliever because they don’t have the same nature.

## **Be Separated unto the Lord**

*Be Separate* Paul concludes, “Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty’” (6:17-18). Because believers are so completely opposite from unbelievers, and because they are God’s temple, they should come out from unbelievers and be separated unto the Lord. Second Corinthians 6:17-18 is a series of quotations from the Old Testament. Verse 17 is basically derived from Isaiah 52:11, with words from Ezekiel 20:30 added. The word “received” denotes “received with favor” (Plummer; Tasker). Isaiah is announcing God’s call to Israel to leave Babylon. They were to leave that which was unclean in Babylon and only take the sacred vessels of the temple with them. God wants His people separated from the unsaved religious world. This is not unqualified separation from the world (1 Cor. 5:11-13), but total separation from the religious world.

The ancient king, Redwald of East Anglia, once built a sanctuary, which, at one end, was the altar for the worship of Christianity, and at the other end, was an altar dedicated to the old British gods. If Paul saw that, he would say to the believers and the Christian end of the temple, come out from among them and be separated from them.

God also declares that His people be separated unto Him. Verse 18 is taken from 2 Samuel 7:14 with words added from Isaiah 43:6. God will not only receive with favor those separated from the world, He will be a Father to them. Believers are not only the temple of God (6:16); they are the family of God (6:18). The one who promised to be a Father was “the Lord Almighty.” He has the power to do whatever He promised.

Verses 17 and 18 are addressed to believers. Notice the flow of thought through the context: You are the temple of God. God lives in you (6:16). Therefore, come out from unbelievers and

be separated unto the Lord (6:17) and the Lord will be a Father to you (6:18). This passage is not teaching that God will be a father and an individual will be a child of God if that person comes out from unbelievers. It is saying *that since you are a believer and God dwells in you, act like His child*, and you will enter fully into the experience of God being your Father. He will take care of you. Hughes argues that these verses apply to believers and says, “There was a grave danger that, through carelessness and compromise, the Corinthian believers would be carried away, as it were, into a Babylonian captivity of soul.”

Queen Victoria once visited a poor widow in a humble cottage at Balmoral. Afterward, some of her neighbors, knowing she was a godly saint, tried to put her on the spot by asking, “Who was the most honored guest you ever entertained in your home?” They expected her to say it was Jesus. To their surprise, she answered, “The most honored guest I have ever entertained is, of course, Her Majesty, the Queen.” “Did you say the queen, Granny? Ah, we caught you this time. What about Jesus, of whom you talk so much.? Isn’t He your most honored guest?” She immediately replied, “No, indeed, he’s not a guest; He lives here.”

Verse 18 says God will be “a Father to you.” There is a difference between being the father *of* a son and being a father *to* a son. When a man fathers a child, he is always the child’s father, but he may be a poor father and, consequently, not a father *to* that child. He may spend no time with him or even provide for him. Likewise, when we trust Christ, God is our Father. As we are separated to Him, He is a Father to us, but if we become unequally yoked with an unbeliever in religious affairs, though God is our Father, He will not be able to be a Father *to* us. We do not allow Him to do that.

*Be Clean* Based on the promises of 2 Corinthians 6:17 and 18, Paul concludes, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (7:1). The promises are the ones mentioned at the end of chapter 6 (see “therefore”), namely, that God would receive them with favor (6:17) and would provide and protect them like a father does his children (6:18).

If the Almighty God promised to shower His favor on us, “let us (notice Paul includes himself) cleanse ourselves from all filthiness.” The Greek word rendered “filthiness” means “defilement.” Such promises should motivate us to cleanse ourselves from every kind of defilement, whether it is an unclean activity that comes from being bound to an unbeliever or an unclean disposition/attitude that results from being connected to an unsaved person. “Flesh and spirit” is that which is “both external and internal, both seen and unseen, both public and private” (Hughes). In the Greek text, the word “cleanse” is in the aorist tense, indicating that this is a definite act. Believers are to break off unholy alliances with unbelievers.

Cleansing is not enough. Believers should cleanse themselves and completely separate themselves unto the Lord. The word translated “perfecting” means “to complete, accomplish, execute.” In the Greek text, “perfecting” is in the present tense, an ongoing process of completing holiness. It is done in the fear of God, that is, in reverence and respect for Him (see 5:10).

In this paragraph (6:11-7:4), cleansing ourselves of defilement means breaking off being unequally yoked (6:14). The yoke Paul had in mind was a religious affiliation with false apostles.

## Be Open

Again, abruptly changing subjects, Paul says, “Open your heart to us” (7:2a). In 2 Corinthians 6:11-17, Paul began appealing to the Corinthians to “be open” (6:13) with him,

meaning opening their hearts to him (6:11). Then he suddenly changed the subject to their relationship with unbelievers (6:14-18). Now, he abruptly changes the subject back to their relationship with them (7:2-4). Second Corinthians 7:2 is a resumption of the discussion of 6:11-13 (Hodge). Therefore, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 relates to the overall subject of 2 Corinthians 6:11-7:4. They shut Paul out (6:12) because they were unequally yoked with unbelievers (6:14-7:1).

*Paul did not Wrong Them* Paul gives three reasons why they should open (Greek: “make room”) their hearts to him: “We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have defrauded no one” (7:2b). The Greek word translated “wronged” means “to do wrong, injure, harm, damage.” The noun form of this verb means “unjust, unrighteous.” “Corrupted” means “ruin, spoil, destroy,” and “defraud” means “to take advantage of, cheat, defraud” (see 12:17-18). Paul denies that he treated anyone unjustly, ruined, or defrauded anyone.

Perhaps the false apostles charged that by instructing the Corinthians to deliver the sinning brother to Satan (1 Cor. 5), Paul had treated the man unjustly, damaged him, and destroyed him. Maybe the false apostles had also charged that Paul had collected money for the poor saints at Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16) and spent it on himself. Thus, Paul had defrauded the Corinthians. If such slanderous rumors circulated and the Corinthians believed them, they would have aligned themselves with unbelievers and shut Paul out of their hearts. Paul insists he has done nothing wrong.

*Paul Loved Them* To prevent being misunderstood, Paul quickly adds, “I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together” (7:3). In other words, Paul is saying by denying the accusations mentioned in verse 2, he is only defending himself, not blaming or condemning them (Hodge). The implication seems to be that he could have found fault, but this is not his intent. He goes on to explain (see “for”) that, as he has already said (see 6:11-13), they are in his heart. In short, he loves them. He is not speaking out of anger or bitterness but out of love. The extent of his love is expressed in the phrase, “To die together and to live together.” Nothing, neither death nor any experience in life, will cause him to cease loving them (Plummer).

*Paul was Open* Thus, Paul observes: “Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boast on your behalf. I am filled with comfort, I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation” (7:4). Concerning them he has boldness of speech and boasting. He has been open and free to speak (6:11) because he loves them (6:12). Concerning himself, he is filled with comfort and joy mainly because of the report about them he received from Titus (see 7:5 ff.). He was filled with comfort and overflowed with joy even in the midst of his current affliction (Hodge).

Paul says, “We are your boast as you are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1:14). Yet, they could glory in him (5:12) and he in them (7:4) now!

**Summary:** Don’t be unequally yoked with unbelievers; thus, defile yourself before the Lord and damage your relationship with other believers. In other words, believers should be separated unto the Lord and open to other believers, not yoked up with unbelievers.

This passage’s primary and direct application concerns “spiritual” or “religious” affiliations. As a believer, I am not to join forces with unbelievers in a “religious” or “spiritual” enterprise. For example, the Unification Church has sent me letters to come to meetings. These letters are more dangerous than a letter bomb. Letter bombs can only kill the body. False teaching about Christ can kill one’s spiritual life.

When shopping for a church, beware. Never join a church that denies the doctrine of Christ or the gospel (11:4). That could be more dangerous or even deadly than a poison pill to your children.

Yoking up with unbelievers in a religious enterprise is incongruous with what believers are and for what they are trying to do. A Hollywood branch of the American Cancer Society yoked up with a professional tennis tournament to hold a benefit night. They later learned that a major tobacco company was sponsoring the tennis tournament. They discovered this embarrassing bondage too late to stop the event. The publicity showed a young woman with a tennis racket in one hand and a cigarette in the other. The American Cancer Society was unequally yoked with a well-known brand of cigarettes.

The point of this passage has to do with “religious” affiliations. It is often, however, applied to marriage. Does the command to not be unequally yoked (6:14) apply to marriage? Technically, Paul does not have marriage in mind. That is obvious from the fact that later in the passage, he says, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord” (6:17), but he has already written to the Corinthians that if they are married to an unbeliever, they are not to divorce that unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:12-17). However, although marriage is not the subject of this passage, the principle in this passage, no doubt, does apply to marriage. Jesus called marriage a yoke (Mt. 19:6) and Paul told widows to marry only in the Lord (1 Cor. 7:39).

Olivia Langdon was reared in a Christian home. She fell in love with Mark Twain, a man who had never trusted Jesus Christ as his savior. Despite this, she married him. At first, her life made a deep impression on him and he regularly asked for the blessing at meal time and even joined her in attending church, but gradually this practice fell by the wayside until he announced, “Livy, I don’t believe in the Bible.” His unbelief slowly eroded her confidence in God in the months and years that followed. Later, during a period of sorrow, he tried to encourage her by saying, “Livy, if it comforts you to lean on the Christian faith, do so.” She could only reply, “Mark, I can’t.” Her former vibrant faith had become too weak. God does not want us to be unequally yoked in marriage because it will affect our relationship with Him.

Likewise, business partnerships are not the subject of this passage, but the principle applies. A friend of mine, who is a seminary professor, concluded that this principle applies to any relationship where the believer is responsible for moral decisions, and the unbeliever could veto those moral decisions.

The story is told of a hunter who had his gun aimed at a large bear and was ready to pull the trigger. Just then, the bear spoke softly, soothingly, saying, “Isn’t it better to talk than to shoot? Why don’t we negotiate the matter? What is it you want?” The hunter lowered his rifle and answered, “I’d like a fur coat.” “That’s good,” said the bear, “I think that’s something we can talk about. All I want is a full stomach. Maybe we can reach a compromise.” So they sat down to talk it over. A little while later, the bear walked away alone. The negotiations had been successful. The bear had a full stomach and the hunter had a fur coat. When believers negotiate with unbelievers, they usually lose their “spiritual” life.

One other word. The point of this passage is a negative warning. Don’t be unequally yoked with unbelievers (6:14), but there is also a positive point here, namely, that we are to open our hearts to believers (6:11-13; 7:2). Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you” (Mt. 11:29). Paul called other believers yoke fellows (Phil. 4:3), so don’t be unequally yoked, be equally yoked.

## THE JOY OF SERVING THE LORD

Serving the Lord can be difficult. No less than the apostle Paul talked about going without food and sleep, going to jail, and being beaten. He was also ridiculed, lied about, slandered, doubted, questioned, and deserted. Serving the Lord can be difficult. It can also be discouraging. The very ones you are trying to help often don't want your help, or they say they want it but do not respond when you give it. Serving the Lord can be discouraging. Imagine going through such hardship only to get a headache and heartbreak. Why go through such difficulty if you are going to get disappointment and discouragement?

One answer, of course, is rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That alone would make everything we go through worth it. There is more. There is comfort and joy in serving the Lord here and now. Paul describes what did that for him in 2 Corinthians 7:5-16.

### God Encourages through the Obedience

Paul began this epistle by discussing his relationship to the Corinthians (1:12-2:11). Then, he digressed to discuss the nature of the ministry (2:12-7:4), concluding with the statements: "I'm filled with comfort. I'm exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation" (7:4).

*Paul was Troubled Now*, he says, "For indeed when we came to Thessalonica, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side" (7:5). In a sense, this is connected to verse 4 (see "for;" Hodge). He is now going to explain comfort in more detail. At the same time, he will return to the discussion he broke off in 2 Corinthians 2:13, namely, his concern for them before Titus arrived.

As he said earlier, he had no rest in his spirit in Troas because he did not find Titus there (2:12-13). He left for Macedonia (2:13). Picking up where he left off in 2 Corinthians 2:13 (Plummer), he now says when he came to Macedonia, he had no rest in his body but was troubled on every side. In 2 Corinthians 2:13, he said he had no rest "in my spirit." Here, he says he had no rest in his body. "Intense anxiety affects both flesh and spirit" (Plummer).

In Macedonia, Paul was "troubled on every side." The same expression is used in 2 Corinthians 4:8. He says, "Outside were conflicts, inside were fears." The pressure was external and internal, outward and inward. The word translated "conflicts" means "fights, quarrels, strifes, disputes." Chrysostom says, "These conflicts were with unbelievers" (Chrysostom, cited by Plummer). Most commentators since Chrysostom have followed that suggestion (Tasker). The truth is no one knows for sure the nature of these conflicts in Macedonia. The conflicts may have caused the fears, but in this passage, at least part of the anxiety was over the spiritual state of the Corinthians.

T. L. Cuyler tells of a young attorney who was heartbroken over the early death of his girlfriend, whom he loved deeply. Rather than being embittered, he became a powerful preacher and successful soul winner. Said Cuyler, "The record book of every Christian has some pages in it which were written at the bidding of that severe teacher, disappointment. Tears may have blurred the page at the time, but as we view it in light of experience, we can write beneath it, 'Thank God for those losses!' They were my everlasting gain" (Cuyler, *Our Daily Bread*, March 14, 1970).

*Paul was Comforted* “Nevertheless, God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (7:6). Paul was “hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed” (4:8). God intervened to comfort him. The Greek word rendered “comfort” means, among other things, “to encourage, cheer up.” God is in the business of comforting and encouraging the downcast, namely, those who are His own and yet discouraged, dejected, and depressed (1:3; also Isa. 49:13). God used the coming of Titus to comfort Paul. No doubt, the joy of the reunion of his friend and fellow workers was part of the comfort.

In this case, there was more, as Paul goes on to explain, “And not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more” (7:7). Titus had been encouraged by the Corinthians. That comforted Paul. He also brought good news concerning their attitude toward Paul. The Corinthians earnestly desired to see Paul again and have a harmonious and happy relationship with him (Tasker). They mourned over not disciplining the disobedient brother (1 Cor. 5:2) and having caused Paul grief. They were still zealous for Paul over against those who were attacking him. Upon hearing this good report from Titus, Paul rejoiced even more than he did just seeing Titus or knowing Titus was encouraged (Plummer).

*Paul Rejoiced* Paul now explains his comfort and joy (see “for”). “For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing” (7:8-9). His explanation sounds complicated; it is rather simple. Paul wrote a letter that made them sorry. The Greek word translated “sorry” means “to distress, grieve, cause pain.” The letter Paul wrote which caused the Corinthians grief and pain was 1 Corinthians. Hughes says it is “replete with material which must have had the impact as it were a rod upon the back of the Corinthians.” He also quotes Tertullian’s assessment that 1 Corinthians was written, “as a whole, not with ink, but with gall.”

Paul acknowledges that he does not now regret having written that letter, although he admits he did regret it at one point. What does he mean? Why did he regret writing 1 Corinthians? Why did he change his mind? He explains (see “for”). He regretted writing it when he perceived that it made them sorry. Love regrets causing pain even when the pain is necessary, such as when a parent has to punish a child (Calvin). In Paul’s case, their short-lived pain led them to repent. Therefore, he now rejoices in their repentance. In short, Paul regretted making them sorry; he rejoices now in that they repented. As he explains (see “for”), they were made sorry in a godly manner and they lost nothing. Hughes claims the meaning of “suffered loss” is the loss of reward (see 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

*Paul Explains* Having said they were sorry in a godly manner, Paul now explains two kinds of sorrow: “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted, but the sorry of the world produces death” (7:10). Sorrow is not repentance; it can lead one to repent, that is, change one’s mind (Hodge). If that happens, the repentance is “to salvation,” meaning spiritual deliverance. Such sorrow is never to be regretted by the person who causes it or experiences it (Hodge). On the other hand, there is a sorrow that only produces death, not life. It is that kind the world experiences. There is sorrow for the consequences, not for the act. Thus, there is not a change of mind that leads to God and deliverance.

Paul explains their sorrow: “For observe this very thing that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produces in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things, you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (7:11). Their godly grief led to spiritual deliverance. Their sorrow produced

diligence. “Diligence” is the rendering of a Greek word that means “haste, zeal, earnestness.” They hastily and earnestly corrected their indifference for the incestuous person. The Greek word translated “cleansing” means “speech in defense.” They corrected the wrong and, thus, cleared themselves. Furthermore, they were indignant at themselves (see “mourning” in 7:7), fearful of God, and possibly Paul in the best sense of the term. Moreover, they had a “vehement desire,” which is the same Greek word which is translated “earnest desire” in verse 7, to see Paul and they had a zeal for him and his ministry. Truly, they had vindicated themselves. They are now clear, that is, pure, guileless, concerning their handling of the incestuous person.

This passage teaches there are two kinds of sorrow—godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow results in deliverance and worldly sorrow results in death. Godly sorrow produces a change of mind, which results in people changing their course of action. Worldly sorrow only causes regret over the results of sin and perhaps motivates people to hide their sin.

The ancient Spartans taught their children that there was no harm in doing anything wrong but that it was a disgrace to be found out. Anything was right as long as it was kept secret. Consequently, as the story goes, a boy who stole a pet fox from his friend kept it hidden under his garment and allowed the fox to eat out of his vitals rather than admit his theft. When confronted, he was sorry he got caught, but that sorrow led to his death.

*Paul Cared for Them* Paul concludes, “Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you” (7:12). The reason Paul said what he did in 1 Corinthians 5 was not to correct the incestuous person (Hodge), although that was no doubt part of his aim, nor was it to secure justice for the man’s father, although that again was involved (Hodge). Instead, the primary purpose of writing was that they might know he cared for them. In fact, in 1 Corinthians, he told them, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you” (1 Cor. 4:14).

It worked! They now saw his care and concern. Before God, they understood Paul’s purpose.

## God Encourages through the Loving Treatment of Believers

*Paul was Comforted* The conclusion of everything said thus far in this paragraph is “Therefore, we have been comforted in your comfort” (7:13a). This is the conclusion (see “therefore”) and the restatement of the point he began in verse 6. Paul was comforted and encouraged by the fact that they were encouraged to be sorrowful and repent to salvation.

*Paul Rejoiced* There is more. Paul adds, “And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all” (7:13b). Paul was encouraged not only by the godly sorrow of the Corinthians but also by their treatment of Titus. Titus could have encountered a difficult time from the divided church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1-4). Instead, he was refreshed by “all,” indicating a unified effort on the part of the church. The Greek word rendered “refreshed” means “to give intermission from labor, to give rest.” Titus had a peaceful, restful visit to Corinth that brought him much joy. His joy over the Corinthians was a source of great encouragement to Paul.

Paul explains, “For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed, but as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so, our boasting to Titus was found true” (7:14). One of the reasons Paul was so greatly encouraged by their treatment of Titus was because he had boasted of them to him. Paul told Titus that the Corinthians would be obedient and correct the wrongs mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 (Plummer; Tasker). He was not ashamed of their response.



The word rendered “ashamed” means “to disgrace, dishonor.” Had the Corinthians not been obedient as Paul predicted, he would have been embarrassed, ashamed, and disgraced like the parents of a grossly disobedient teenager. Paul’s prophecy had come true. Paul inserted that what he said about them was true, just like all the things he said to them. His own sincerity and integrity had been challenged at Corinth and he, too, had been proven true as well as them (see 1:17-18). Their response was part of the truth of his ministry (see 3:2).

Furthermore, Paul adds, “And his affections are greater for you as he remembered the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him” (7:15). Paul was not embarrassed; he was proven right and Titus has greater affections for them, remembering their obedience. The expression “fear and trembling” indicates nervous anxiety to do their duty (Plummer). Paul had come to them in fear and trembling (1 Cor. 3:2-3). Now, he received Titus in the same spirit, starkly contrasting the attitude of the troublemakers in their midst.

Paul concludes, “Therefore, I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything” (7:16). This concludes this paragraph (7:5-16), this section (6:11-7:2; Plummer), and for that matter, the book up to this point (Hodge; Tasker). Their obedience to do what is right and their reception and treatment of Titus was grounds for Paul to rejoice that he could trust them in every area. This is the perfect transition to the discussion of the collection (chapters 8-9) and false apostles (chapters 10-13).

**Summary:** God encourages His servants through believers obeying the Word and loving each other.

Some do not serve others in their church. As a rule, these are selfish, self-centered people who are not the happiest people in a congregation. Others serve, encountering difficulty and discouragement. Consequently, they quit. Then, some persevere in service until they see others being obedient to the Lord and loving one another. That is one of the sources of joy in serving the Lord.

When I was a teenager, I made model airplanes. It was tedious and sometimes tiring work. The joy was seeing the job completed and proudly displaying the plane. Years later, I became a parent. That, too, is a tedious, sometimes tiring job. The joy is seeing them become obedient and loving. The job of rearing obedient, loving children is much more difficult than the job of building model airplanes, but the joy is also greater. There is no greater joy (2 Jn. 4).

## AN EXAMPLE TO EMULATE

When I was a boy, I regularly attended the Saturday matinee. Cowboys, crime stoppers, and combat troops became my heroes. After seeing a movie, I walked like the hero and talked like the hero until the next hero took his place. When I became a Christian, several godly men became my role models. I aspired to be like them, attempted to be like them, and in some cases, succeeded. In other areas, I failed. I remember once, when I was in my late twenties, meeting a pastor who was about 40 years old. I went home and told my wife, “I’ve met a man that I want to be like when I’m 40 years old.” I’m many years past that now and no doubt his life has impacted mine. At the same time, I would say I’ve not obtained at my age what that man had when he was forty. Having models and mentors to imitate is a natural part of physical and spiritual growth.

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that they should follow him as he followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul told individual believers to follow him and told churches to mimic other churches. Of course, that means that the individuals in a church would have to follow the actions of the model church, but what should be followed? In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul gave the Corinthian church an example of a church they should emulate.

### Example: Some Believers Give Generously

*In Spite of Poverty* Having concluded the first major section of his letter by telling the Corinthians that he rejoiced over his confidence in them in everything (7:16), Paul now moves to a different subject (Hodge). “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality” (8:1-2). He addresses them affectionately as brethren, not authoritatively as an apostle. Paul informs the Corinthians about the grace of God given to and exhibited by the churches of Macedonia. Macedonia was located in the northern part of Greece. Corinth was in the southern half of Greece. Thus, these two were “neighbors.” Paul had established a church in the Macedonia cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

God’s grace enabled the Macedonians to generously give money and great joy to the poor saints in Jerusalem (Tasker). Their giving was particularly remarkable. For one thing, it was “in a great trial of affliction.” Several years earlier, when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he mentioned their affliction (1 Thess. 1:6), which, at least, included persecution (1 Thess. 2:14-16). The affliction of the Macedonians was great, that is, it was either severe, prolonged, or both. Furthermore, they gave even though they were experiencing deep poverty. Their poverty was “rock bottom.” They were financially scraping the bottom of the barrel; nevertheless, their joy overflowed as they generously gave of their substance.

The Roman government had been hard on the Macedonians. They took possession of the gold and silver mines and taxed the right to smelt copper and iron. The Romans also reserved the importation of salt and the felling of timber for shipbuilding. The Macedonians said their nation was “a lacerated and disjointed animal” (Plummer). They definitely lived in hard economic times. Yet soon after their conversion, the Philippians sent money to Paul when he was in Thessalonica not once but twice (Phil. 4:15-16). Several years later, the poor saints at Philippi and Thessalonica, and possibly Berea, are generously giving to the poor saints at Jerusalem.

*Beyond their Means* Thus, by God's grace, the Macedonians gave even though they were in great affliction and poverty. Generosity is not just the privilege of the rich. Congregations with rich members might give greater sums, but when measured proportionately, it is often humble saints with meager means who are the most generous. Such was the case with the Macedonians.

Paul further explains what the Macedonians did. "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (8:3-4). With a series of praises, Paul explains just how generous the Macedonians were. They gave *according to their ability*. Someone making \$25,000 a year could not possibly give \$30,000. They would not have that ability.

The Macedonians gave *beyond their ability*. Given their ability, their income, and their situation, that is, their poverty, they gave a greater proportion of their income than would be expected (8:5). They showed "a complete disregard of their own requirements both present and future (Hughes).

The Macedonians *freely* gave beyond their ability. The Greek word translated "freely willing" is a compound word that means "self-choice, of one's accord," perhaps "spontaneously" captures the spirit of this word.

Moreover, the Macedonians *begged* to do it. The word rendered "imploring" means "to beg, request, beseech." They insisted that Paul receive their contributions so that they could share (see the word "fellowship") in this service to the saints in Jerusalem. As Chrysostom remarks, they begged, not Paul (Chrysostom, cited by Hughes).

A year earlier, Paul had boasted to the Thessalonians that the Corinthians were willing and ready to give (9:2). Evidently, that prompted the Macedonians to spontaneously want to participate.

In Colonial America, a converted Indian asked Henry Benjamin Whipple to give him two one-dollar bills for a two-dollar certificate. "Why do you want two bills?" asked the preacher. The Indian replied, "One dollar for me to give to Jesus and one for my wife to give." The preacher objected, "Isn't this all the money you have?" "Yes," was the simple reply. Another convert standing nearby whispered to the preacher, "It might be too much for the white man to give, but it's not too much for an Indian who this year, for the first time, has heard of the love of Jesus Christ." The Macedonians were Indian givers like that.

*Giving Themselves* Paul adds one other word, "And this they did, not as we had hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God" (8:5). The word translated "hope" means "expectation." What the Macedonians did was beyond Paul's expectations. The Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord. They submitted themselves to the Lord to be obedient to Him. They were willing to do whatever the Lord desired them to do with their lives and possessions.

Then, they gave themselves to Paul and his companions to serve them in any way they could in the will of God. God's will is for believers to obey Him and serve others. That is precisely what the Macedonians did.

A missionary reported seeing an offering taken in a poor African church. He said it was not uncommon to see people putting in a banana or an egg. One day, he watched as the plate was being passed. He came to a young girl. As she held the plate, she bowed her head and closed her eyes. He knew what she was doing. She was praying something like, "Lord, I would like to give you something, but I have no money. What I have is what I'm giving to you right now. I'm giving you myself."

## Exhortation: Believers should Give Generously

*The Example of the Macedonians* As a result of what the Macedonians had done, Paul decided to speak again to the Corinthians about their gifts to the saints at Jerusalem. “So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well” (8:6). Paul had written to them about this collection (1 Cor. 16:1-4). Apparently, Titus had begun the collection when he was there (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6-7, 13-15). Now, Paul wanted Titus to complete the collection.

One of the reasons they should complete the collection is the example of the Macedonians (see “so”). The Macedonians were a great example of generous giving because they give 1) during great affliction (8:2), 2) despite great poverty (8:2), 3) with great joy (8:2), 4) beyond their means (8:3), 5) freely (8:3), 6) with much pleading (8:4), and 7) first giving themselves to the Lord and to others (8:5).

A pastor on the way to speak at a church told the cab driver to take him to Ebenezer Chapel. “Oh,” said the man, “you mean Little Charlie’s Chapel, at least that’s what we call it around here.” The cabby explained that people wanted to build a church but were poor. Just when they were about to give up the project, a small boy came to the minister’s door with six bricks he had collected. Young Charlie had gladly pushed his toy wheelbarrow halfway across the town to deliver them. He said it was all he had, but he hoped they could start the new church. The congregation was so moved by the youngster’s helpful attitude and cheerful giving that they decided to go ahead with the chapel.

*The Extent of their Blessings* Paul then added a personal word to the Corinthians, “But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also” (8:7). Paul reminds the Corinthians that they have had an abundance of spiritual gifts and graces (see 1 Cor. 1:4-7). They had the gift of faith (1 Cor. 12:9; 13:2), gifts of speech like prophecy (1 Cor. 1:5; 12:10), and the gift of knowledge (1 Cor. 1:5; 12:8). They were also blessed with every zeal, diligence, and earnestness (2 Cor. 7:11). They were eager and earnest in their spiritual pursuits, one example of which was their love for Paul (2 Cor. 7:7). As they had abounded in every other spiritual gift and grace, they should abound in the grace of giving also.

Many years ago, some churches practiced assigning their members a certain amount they should give to the church each year. One man complained to Sam Jones, the famous evangelist. “How much do you pay?” the evangelist asked. “Five dollars a year,” was the answer. “Well,” responded Jones, “How long have you been converted?” The man told Jones that he had been saved for about four years. Then Jones asked, “What sort of man were you before you were saved?” “I was a drunkard,” came the reply. Jones continued, “How much did you spend on a drink?” “Oh, I’d say about \$250 a year.” “How much were you worth?” “I had nothing I could really call my own. I rented land and plowed with a steer.” “What have you now?” persisted the evangelist. “I have a good plantation and a span of horses.” Jones emphatically stated, “Well, you paid the devil \$250 a year for plowing with a steer on rented land and now you don’t want to give God, who saved you \$5.00 for the privilege of plowing with a horse on your plantation. You’re a rascal from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot.”

**Summary:** When believers see how greatly they have been blessed spiritually and how generously others give, they should be motivated to give.

If poverty-stricken believers in great affliction freely and joyfully give beyond their means, those who have been richly blessed should also be motivated to give.

Here's the model. First, give yourself to the Lord. Then give yourself to others in service. After that, freely, generously, sacrificially give of your substance.

Once, eleven people became stranded on a huge block of ice that broke away from the mainland. The huge, frozen block began to melt. It threatened to sweep the people upon it down the river to their death. A crowd gathered on the shore. One man watching the catastrophe that seemed inevitable stepped up to the crowd and offered fifty dollars to anyone who would attempt to rescue the stranded people. No one moved. Then, obtaining a rope, he tied one end around his waist and offered to join with anyone who would rope themselves to him to rescue those in dire jeopardy. Immediately, four men leaped to his side. They roped themselves to the same line and the five of them, picking their way over a dangerous gorge, at the hazard of their lives, brought all eleven safely to shore. When the man offered money, no one was stirred. When they saw him give himself, they drew to his side in an instant.

That's what Paul is saying. The Thessalonians gave of themselves. Then, they gave of their substance. We should do like they did.

## GUIDELINES FOR GIVING

What determines what you give? Do you use the tipping method, the tithing method, or the taxing guideline? The tipping method is giving to God, like tipping a waiter. For services rendered, we pluck a buck in the plate. The taxing guideline says that you deduct however much you donate. Would you rather give to God or the government? Besides, it would help if you had the deduction because the more you give, the more you get back in a refund. The tithing method is taken from the Old Testament. The Jews gave ten percent, so we should do the same. What guidelines should you use to determine what to give? In 2 Corinthians 8:8-15, Paul lists some of the guidelines for grace giving. There are others. These, however, are basic and essential.

### Giving should be Motivated by Love

*Not by Command* Having told the Corinthians that they should abound in the grace of giving (8:7), Paul now adds a clarification: “I speak not by commandment but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others” (8:8). By giving the Corinthians the example of the Macedonians, Paul is not commanding them to give (Plummer; Hodge). Only one with authority to command can meaningfully say, “I am not commanding you.” As an apostle, Paul could perhaps have commanded them to give, but Paul is not issuing an order. Generosity cannot be commanded. What Paul is doing is telling them about the diligence of the Macedonians to see what they would do. It is a test of the genuineness of their love (Hodge). The Greek word translated “sincerity” (Greek: “genuineness”) implies an expectation of a favorable outcome. Paul is expecting the Corinthians to follow the example of the Macedonians (Plummer).

*By Love* Paul explains (“for”) why they do not need a command: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (8:9). The Corinthians didn’t need a command (Plummer). They had the example of Christ to teach them about sacrificial grace giving (*cf.* “grace” in 8:7 with “grace” in 8:9).

Christ was rich. Jesus prayed, “And now, oh Father, glorify Me together with Yourself with the glory which I had with you before the world was” (Jn. 17:5). Who can ever begin to imagine the wealth of the glory Jesus had with the Father before the creation of the world? He created all things (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16) and all things were created for Him (Col. 1:16). He was not just rich; he created wealth.

Christ became poor for our sakes. He gave up the riches and glory of heaven and took up the poverty and humility of the incarnation (Phil. 2:7-8). He went from riches to rags for us. “None was richer than He; none became poorer than He (Hughes). Christ’s purpose was through His poverty, we might become rich. Had Christ not taken on the poverty of the incarnation, we would never have had the spiritual riches of forgiveness, justification, regeneration, eternal life, or future glorification. Christ gave Himself to benefit and bless others. His example of giving is the supreme incentive to generosity.

During a missionary conference, a church was asked to give money to feed starving children in India. The boys and girls in the congregation were urged to participate by giving a toy. When the time came for the offering, a little girl began to cry as though her heart would break. In her arms, she tightly squeezed a well-worn doll. Everyone could see that she was having a struggle

parting with her cherished possession. Then all of a sudden, a smile broke across her tears and running to the front, she placed the doll on the altar, saying, “I’m sorry, Mr. Missionary, I forgot for a while it is all for Jesus.”

When we forget Him, we clutch to our possessions. When we remember Him, we gladly release them.

## **Giving should be Regulated by Willingness**

*Finish What Started* Paul did not command the Corinthians to give. He did, however, give them counsel: “And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have” (8:10-11). Paul’s *opinion* was that giving was to their advantage (Hodge; Tasker). The Greek word translated “advantage” means “profitable.” They would profit at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

In the Greek text, the expression “a year ago” could mean “last year” (Plummer; Hodge). Sometime within the past year, the Corinthians had not only desired to give but actually began the collection. This was no doubt a result of receiving Paul’s previous letter (1 Cor. 16:1-4). They failed to complete the collection for some reason that was not explained. Thus, Paul advises them to finish what they have started.

*Willingly* At the end of verse 11, Paul says they should give “out of what they have.” He goes on to explain what he means by that: “For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have” (8:12). As long as people give because they want to and out of what they have the ability to, their gift is acceptable to God. The standards by which God judges a gift are desire and ability. In other words, the amount is not the issue. The issues are first a willingness to give and, second, the resources to do it. The Macedonians had given beyond their ability (8:3). Paul is not suggesting that the Corinthians do that, only that they be willing and give out of what they have.

## **Giving should be Generated by Equality**

*Equity* Another explanation is in order: “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened” (8:13). The “others” to whom Paul refers are the poor saints at Jerusalem (Hodge). In raising funds for their release, Paul was not easing the burden of the saints at Jerusalem by increasing the burden on the brethren in Corinth.

“But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality” (8:14). The Corinthians should not be burdened, but there should be equality and fairness. Paul is not advocating communism. The Scripture recognizes the private ownership of property and the necessity of voluntary giving. Moreover, the issue here is relief for the poor, not just the redistribution of wealth for equality’s sake.

The equality Paul has in mind is not equality of wealth but equal relief from the burden of want (Hodge). As Paul clearly says, the Corinthians were enjoying economic abundance at the moment. Thus, without an overdue burden, they could supply the lack of believers in Jerusalem. At some future time, the situation may be reversed. Then, out of their abundance, they might be able to meet your needs.

Granny Holdeman, an 80-year-old missionary in Haiti, said the less people possess, the more willing they are to share. Her grandson, who grew up in that nation, once declared that the country's people have a philosophy: "If I have something today, I'll share it because tomorrow, when I have nothing, you will share with me."

*Explanation* Paul quotes Scripture to prove his point, "As it is written, He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack" (8:15). The quotation is from Exodus 16:18. Exactly how this equality happened is not clear. One suggestion is that the young and vigorous gathered more than they needed while the aged and infirmed gathered less, but they all put what they had together and measured what was needed to each other (Hughes). Another explanation is that the hoarded foods spoiled, and the ones who gathered less had their supply increased (Hodge). Whatever the particulars, the result was equality of necessary food.

A member of the Baltimore City Council conceived of the idea of helping the poor pay their overdue heating bills. Homeowners were asked to contribute one dollar by adding it to their bill. Soon, the idea caught on in other parts of the country, so customers of 144 gas and electric companies in more than thirty states were assisting needy neighbors. In many programs, these dollars are matched by the utility companies. For the individual customer, one dollar doesn't seem like much, but when many give a little, it quickly adds up and the benefits to the poor are tremendous.

**Summary:** Giving should be motivated by love, regulated by a willingness to give, and generated by equality. In short, giving should be based on willingness, ability, and equality.

The problem with tipping is it doesn't honor the Lord. He owns all; He has given the best. Tipping does not apply. (By the way, a good tip is 15%.) Tithing does not apply because we are not under the Law (Rom. 6:14). (Besides, tithing in the Old Testament was not 10%; it was more like 23%.) The fallacy of the "taxing guideline" is that the government, not God, determines the gift.

Whatever you do, do it willingly, freely, out of love. When love governs the heart, it guides the hand to the pocketbook. Give not from the top of your purse but from the bottom of your heart. God wants you to give because you love Him and you want to give to Him. He also wants you to give out of your ability and to help meet the needs of others. Imagine receiving a Christmas or birthday gift because the giver felt it was his or her duty. If given out of necessity, you would not appreciate it as much as if given gladly from the heart. That's the way God feels.



## HONORABLE MONEY HANDLING

On the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* was an article entitled “Deficit-Reduction Bill Rife with Favoritism.” It began: “Taxes on a bottle of wine will go up 700% when the new federal budget plan is signed into law—unless the wine was produced in Oregon. A provision of the tax bill passed by Congress over the weekend exempts small wineries from the increase and, to the consternation of many Californians, the definition of small happens to fit all 85 wineries in Oregon. That is the home state of Senator Bob Packwood, the top Republican on the Senate tax-writing committee and the sponsor of the exemption.

Similarly, Lehigh University has spent three years looking for money to build a naval research center. Its ship came in last weekend when Congress voted to give the Pennsylvania college \$24 million for the facility. The public and most members of Congress would have a hard time explaining the \$24 million. It was buried in an obscure amendment that did not even mention Lehigh. Instead, the money is earmarked for Competitive Technologies, Inc., a congressional staff member called “nothing more than a paper, dummy organization.”

Similar breaks that slipped through Congress in the waning hours of last week’s session benefit everything from makers of large cigars to wealthy art patrons, a small theater in West Virginia, and manufacturers of ethanol, a gasoline substitute. Despite the contention by some lawmakers that they and their aides kept the special breaks to a minimum this time around, the new federal budget is rife with examples of favoritism that appear to counter the spirit of the deficit-reduction package (Edwin Chen and Douglas Frantz, “Deficit-Reduction Bill Rife with Favoritism.” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 30, 1990).

When we hear how the government spends our tax dollars, we feel like not paying our taxes.

The same week that article appeared, another story on the front page of the *L. A. Times* said, “Soon after AIDS patient Ryan White won his poignant battle to remain in a public school in Indiana, a group called Athletes and Entertainers for Kids signed on as his national fund-raising arm. Together, they became a potent force on the Hollywood charity circuit. The entertainment community turned out in droves in 1988 for a glitzy benefit at the Century Plaza Hotel headlined by pop star Elton John, with tickets going for as much as \$2,000. The following year, Athletes and Entertainers put on an equally spectacular fund-raiser honoring Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. The tribute to the retiring basketball legend was broadcast on national television. Last spring, former President and Mrs. Ronald Reagan attended an Academy Awards night party to benefit the charity. It also was White’s last public appearance. Seven months after his death, White’s name still appears on Athletes’ and Entertainers’ fund-raising appeals, and his mother, Jeanne White, remains among its biggest boosters. Now, the organization’s achievements, as well as its fiscal management, are being called into question. John, who was at White’s bedside during his final hours, has severed his ties to Athletes and Entertainers because a \$25,000 donation he made to the charity for use by the White family was never turned over to them” (Alan Citron, “Charity Reaches for the Stars—Critics Say It Falls Short,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 2, 1990).

When we read stories like that, we feel like not giving to charity.

The theft was not discovered at first. No one suspected. After all, it was money given to the church. Who would steal church money? In this case, it was the man handling the money! I know of several instances where an usher, a money handler, or a treasurer of a church has been caught with his hand in the offering plate. Or take another illustration. A church board member

bought a piece of property that was given to the church. Within six months, he sold it for double what he paid for it. Then, of course, there are the stories of the pastor misappropriating funds or just leaving town with church money in his pocket.

When we find out such things, we feel like not giving to church!

What a disgrace to the individuals and the church. What can be done to prevent such dishonorable handling of money? Paul was once involved in fundraising. One of the things he did was provide honorable money-handling, which he explains in 2 Corinthians 8:16-24.

## Titus is Coming

*Titus Cared* Second Corinthians 8:16-23 is a “letter of commendation” for three men who were coming to Corinth to handle the collection. The first is Titus: “But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus” (8:16). Paul has expressed his concern for the Corinthians regarding the collection. He told them it was profitable to give (8:10). Now, he says Titus has the same earnest care for them as he does. Both of these men were concerned for the poor saints of Jerusalem, but they also cared about the Corinthians. It was for their profit at the Judgment Seat of Christ that they gave (8:10).

*Titus Wanted to Returned* Paul explains, “For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent he went to you of his own accord” (8:17). Apparently, Paul had asked Titus to undertake this project. Titus not only accepted (Greek, “welcomed”) the opportunity but was also much more diligent and zealous—he wanted to go. Titus didn’t need to be asked; he volunteered, demonstrating his care for the Corinthians. Titus had just returned to Corinth (7:6-7), yet he cared for them, not just the Jerusalem believers, and wanted to turn around virtually immediately and make the trip back. Travel was not as simple, easy, or fast as it is today; even today, traveling can be tiring.

*God Did It* Paul thanked God for putting this care for the Corinthians in Titus’ heart. This is an interesting passage. Notice Paul asked Titus to go (8:17), and Titus wanted to go (8:17), yet it was God who did it (8:16).

To another church at another time, the apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13). Many have concluded that these verses say God has worked His salvation in you; now you work it out. As one has said, “He (the believer) must ‘work out’ what God by His grace has ‘worked in’” (Muller, *Philippians*).

Perhaps Nehemiah is an illustration. He heard that the people in Jerusalem were being reproached and the wall needed to be rebuilt (Neh. 1:3). He prayed that God would let him go (Neh. 1:4-11). He got permission from the king to make the trip (Neh. 2:1-8) and journeyed to Jerusalem (Neh. 2:9-11). Then he writes, “Then I arose in the night, I and a few with me. I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem” (Neh. 2:12). Until chapter 2, verse 12, everything sounds as if it was all Nehemiah’s idea, but he says it was God who was working in him. Likewise, Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians 8 that when he asked Titus to go, Titus volunteered, but when all is said and done, God was working in Titus’ heart.

Are you serving the Lord? Has God put it in your heart to do something for Him? As a believer in Jesus Christ, you have a spiritual gift and ought to be serving. If you believe in Jesus Christ and are not doing something for Him, you are not where God wants you to be. The

something may be anything from encouraging reproached people to building a wall or handling money.

## **A Brother is to Accompany Titus**

*An Excellent Reputation* Titus did not return to Corinth alone. “And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches” (8:18). Paul sent an unnamed brother with Titus. This brother had an excellent reputation among all the churches. They praised his commitment to, labor for, and success in promoting the gospel. Who was this unidentified brother? Many men have been nominated. One commentator says that “as many names have been suggested as there are scholars to conjecture them (Hughes, for a discussion of all the possibilities, see Hughes, pp. 312-316). It has been “generally supposed” (Barnes) that it was Luke (Plummer; Tasker), but scholars have argued for Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Aristarchus Sopater, Secundus, Gaius, John Mark, Tophinus, Tychicus, and a literal brother of Titus. All the churches of the first century knew who he was, but no church today knows for sure who he was. “True discipleship often involves obscurity” (MacDonald).

*Chosen by the Churches* “And not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with his gift which is administered by us to the glory of God Himself and to show your ready mind” (8:19). This brother was not only praised by the churches, he was chosen by the churches for the project. The churches that selected and sent this brother could be the churches of Judea, Asia Minor, or Macedonia.

Dr. Will Houghton told of a soldier who became a Christian through watching a believer who was also in the military service. The thing that impressed him was that although the other men of the regiment made fun of the Christian soldier, they always left their money in his possession for safekeeping. When you can trust a man with your money, you can trust him.

The way these friends were being handled is for God’s glory and the people’s confidence. Paul is administering the money in such a way that God will be glorified and the people will be ready to give.

*To Avoid Blame* He adds, “Avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us—providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (8:20-21). Two men were sent to avoid blame and arrange for what is beautiful before God and men. The Greek word rendered “lavish” means “thick, abundance.” Paul assumes that the collection will be large. Thus, two honest and honorable men were sent to handle it to prevent someone from blaming them for mishandling the funds (Hodge).

Verse 21 is a quotation from Proverbs 3:4. The Greek word rendered “honorable” means “beautiful.” Paul wanted the way they handled money to be beautiful before both God and men.

Many years ago, F. B. Meyer preached a message in 2 Corinthians 8:21. In it, he urged the believers in his congregation to handle their money honorably and pay their debts. The response to the sermon was so great that the local post office ran out of money orders from people buying them to settle unpaid debts.

## **Another Brother is also Coming**

*Proven Diligent* A third brother was to join the other two. Of him, Paul writes, “And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much

more diligent, because of the great confidence which *we have in you*" (8:22). In the past, this brother had proven to be diligent many times in many things. Undoubtedly, he will be even more diligent in this task because, through the testimony of Paul and Titus, he now has great confidence in the Corinthians. The phrase "we have" at the end of verse 22 is not in the Greek text (note the italics). The brother being sent to them is the one spoken of as having confidence in them (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker).

Richard DeHaan tells of a time when he was a young man working with his father, the famous doctor turned preacher, M. R. DeHaan. Each morning, they stopped to pick up the local newspaper his father read during his coffee break. Richard explained that they got to work one morning, and his father discovered that he had mistakenly taken two newspapers instead of one, as that day's edition was extremely thin. At first, M. R. DeHaan said he would simply pay the man for the extra paper later. Then he said, "No, I'd better go back with this paper for someone will no doubt lose out on this morning's news and I don't want Mr. K\_\_\_\_\_, who is not a Christian, to think I am dishonest." He got in his car, rode back to the store, and returned the additional paper. About a week later, a robbery occurred in the same small store. It was discovered that only two men were in the store at the time of the robbery, M. R. DeHaan and another man. The grocer, however, immediately eliminated Dr. DeHaan. He said, "That man is really honest. He came all the way back here just to return a newspaper he got by mistake. It must be the other customer who is the thief." The police arrested the other man, who later made a full confession. M. R. DeHaan had proved himself honest in returning the paper and so wasn't suspected even when it looked like he might be guilty.

The unnamed brother in 2 Corinthians 8:22 had likewise proven himself diligent and honest in many things, so they knew he could be trusted to handle money.

*Trustworthy* Paul sums up all he has said about these three (Hodge): "If anyone inquires about Titus he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ" (8:23). If someone wants to know who these three men are collecting such a large sum of money, he is to be told that Titus is the apostle's partner and fellow worker for the Corinthians. This is the only time Paul uses the word partner of one of his associates. Titus is thus closely identified with the apostle. The other two are brothers, that is, fellow believers, are messengers of the churches (Greek, "apostles of the churches") and the glory of Christ. They reflect His glory (Calvin; Hodge; Tasker).

## Give to Prove your Love

*Prove Your Love* Paul concludes, "Therefore show to them and before the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf" (8:24). Since the men collecting the money are blameless, honorable, and trustworthy, the Corinthians are admonished to give generously. By giving freely and generously, the Corinthians will be "practically" proving their love to the delegation who has confidence in them (7:15; 8:22; Tasker) and to the churches who will shortly hear about what they have done.

*Justify My Boast* Furthermore, by giving, they will justify Paul's boasting concerning them (Hodge). Paul had boasted to Titus (7:14) and the Macedonians (9:2).

**Summary:** Knowing that when the money is collected, it will be handled by trustworthy men in an honorable way should motivate believers to prove their love for the Lord by generously

giving. What you give to the Lord should be handled in an honorable way by trustworthy men and you should handle your money in an honorable way by honoring the Lord with it.

The modern application of this passage is simple and direct. Paul sent three men to handle the money. Each was honorable, yet he sent three. In a similar fashion, churches today should choose honorable men to handle the money but not let one man alone do it. Two or more should handle the funds.

The principle of this passage that money should be handled in an honorable way could be applied to issues beyond sending three men to handle the funds. For example, handling money today in an honorable way would be things like having a budget, which designates where the funds will be spent and making sure that the funds are only spent according to the budget. Have the books of a church audited by an outside auditing firm. It could even extend to having two people sign a check instead of one.

Beyond all those safeguards, once believers have confidence in the credibility of the handling of money, they should give generously out of a heart of love. A pastor of a large congregation made an appeal in a fundraising drive. Many in the church came forward to place their offering in a plate before the whole church. Among them was a small, lame girl who hobbled to the front of the church. Pulling a ring from her finger, she placed it on the plate and she hobbled back to her seat. After the service, an usher was sent to bring her to the pastor. When the pastor and the little girl were together, he said to her, "My dear, I saw what you did. It was beautiful, but the people's response has been so generous that we have more than enough to care for our needs. We don't feel right about keeping your treasured ring, so we want to return it." To his surprise, the little girl shook her head in refusal. With a look of rebuke in her eyes, she said, "Pastor, you don't understand. I didn't give my ring to you or the church, I gave it to the Lord."

That pastor and church handled the money in an honorable way and the little girl handled her possessions in an honorable way.

# CHRISTIAN FUNDRAISERS

Some parts of the human body are hard and rough. As a result of walking, the heel is tough. Other parts of the human body are soft and sensitive, such as the arch of the foot. That part of the foot is ticklish, whereas the heel is not. Certain parts of the body of Christ are like the heel. Those parts are hard and can take “rough” treatment. We can talk about doctrinal differences with a rough and ready attitude. Other parts of the body of Christ are soft and sensitive, like the part of the foot that is sensitive to being tickled. One such part is the wallet. The minute a minister talks about money, people get sensitive.

Perhaps one of the most sensitive areas in the discussion of money is the subject of a fundraiser. Have you ever been part of a church that employed a professional fundraiser? Because of a negative experience, fundraisers are a sensitive subject for some Christians. Many fundraisers follow a procedure that has received severe criticism. That procedure includes such practices as 1) directing the church to establish a goal for the amount to be raised, which strikes many as being ambitious if not beyond the means of the congregation, 2) using “testimonials” of people who have given large sums of money, 3) guiding the church to establish a campaign committee, the members of which contact every family or individual in the church to solicit from them a pledge toward the campaign goal. One of the major criticisms of this procedure is that some feel it puts pressure on people to give.

What does the Bible say about professional Christian fundraisers? Technically, there were no such professional fundraisers in the first-century church. There is a spiritual gift of giving money; there is no spiritual gift of collecting money. However, the Bible does discuss the collection of funds. The principles it teaches can provide insight into the practices and procedures of professional fundraising today. One such passage is 1 Corinthians 9:1-5.

## They were Willing and Ready to Give

*They did not need Instruction* Second Corinthians 8-9 is Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians on giving. He didn’t need to write to them concerning the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. He admits, “Now concerning the ministering to the saints it is superfluous for me to write to you” (9:1). The collection for the saints is here called the ministering to the saints (8:4). The Corinthians did not need to be instructed concerning such a ministry.

*They were Willing and Ready* Paul explains why: “For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago” (9:2a). The reason it was redundant to write to them is that they were willing to give long ago. Within the last year, probably when they received 1 Corinthians, they expressed a willingness to give and had begun the collection (8:10). Paul had bragged to the Macedonians about the willingness of the Corinthians to support the campaign to raise funds for the poverty-stricken saints at Jerusalem. Paul used the Corinthians as an example to the Macedonians and later used the Macedonians as an example to the Corinthians (8:1- 5).

*They Provoked Others* In fact, Paul could say, “And your zeal has stirred up the majority” (9:2b). It was their example that stirred up a majority of the Macedonians to give (Hodge). The implication seems to be that more of the Macedonians than would have responded did so because of the enthusiasm of the Corinthians.

Thus, Paul is saying it was unnecessary for him to write about the collection. The Corinthians had been willing for some time and had begun, and their example inspired others to give. Perhaps the first and foremost principle of Christian fundraising is that all giving should be done willingly. The Corinthians were willing. Paul had used their willingness to stir up others to be willing to give, but all who gave did so willingly. Throughout this discussion on giving, Paul repeatedly said that giving should be done from a heart of love (8:8, 24). He has repeatedly pointed out that the Corinthians were willing to give (8:10, 11, 12, 24).

God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn. 3:16). When people trust Christ, the Holy Spirit of God, the spirit of love, is placed within their hearts. The spirit that provoked God to give His Son is in our hearts to motivate us to be like God and give. It is as natural for believers in Jesus Christ to give of themselves and their substance as it is for the sun to give light, apple trees to bear apples, and humans to breathe. The sun willingly shines, apple trees willingly bear fruit, and humans willingly breathe. The sun is not forced to radiate, apple trees are not compelled to bear fruit, and humans don't need any help breathing unless they are seriously sick.

### **Paul Sent a Delegation**

*The Sending* Paul continues, “Yet I have sent the brethren” (9:3a). The Greek word translated “yet” is the word “and.” Paul knows their willingness to give “and” he is sending the brethren, namely Titus and his two companions (8:16-23), to handle the collection. The word “and” here has more the sense of “thus” or “so” than “but” or “yet.” In other words, Paul is saying since they were willing to give, he is sending a delegation to collect.

*The Purpose* The purpose of sending the delegation was “lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect that as I said, you may be ready” (9:3b). The Corinthians had much earlier expressed a willingness to give (8:10-11). Paul had bragged to the Macedonians about the desire of the Corinthians (8:24). Now, his concern is that his boasting might turn out to be empty (Hodge). He quickly adds that he only means in respect to his saying that they were ready (Plummer).

*The Explanation* Paul explains, “Lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting” (9:4). Paul was in Macedonia as he wrote (2:13; 7:5). When he left Macedonia to come to Corinth, some of the Macedonians would no doubt come with him. If that happened, he did not want them to find that the Corinthians had not completed the collection (8:11), and thus, he, because of his boast of them, would be embarrassed.

*The Conclusion* Paul concludes, “Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your bountiful gift beforehand, that you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation” (9:5). The brethren mentioned here are, of course, the delegation of 8:16-20 (9:3). To prevent embarrassment, both theirs and his (9:4), Paul sent this delegation to prepare their gift.

The wording of this concluded statement carefully clarifies several critical issues. First, the Corinthians had previously promised to give. They were giving willingly (9:2). Furthermore, their giving could be described as a “bountiful gift” and “as a matter of generosity.” In the Greek text, “bountiful” and “generosity” are the same Greek word. It means “blessing.” Their gift was their willing blessing, their benefit to others. In this context, the word carries the connotation of bountiful and generous (see 9:6, for its meaning is determined by its antithesis).

The gift was not a “grudging obligation,” a Greek word that means “grasping, aggression, covetousness.” Arndt and Gingrich, who wrote the well-respected and authoritative lexicon on the Greek New Testament, claim that this context calls for the pregnant meaning of this word, “a gift that is grudgingly granted by avarice.” Lightfoot says that this word describes the “disposition which is ever ready to sacrifice one’s neighbor to oneself in all things, not in money dealing merely” (Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of Paul*). Another commentator observes that in the case of giving, it means “keeping for one’s use what ought to be bestowed on another” (Plummer).

The point of verses 3-5 is that Paul sent a delegation to collect their contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem. While these were not “professional fundraisers,” they were something like “a finance committee” to collect what the Corinthians wanted to give.

Someone once asked a farmer, “How much milk does your cow give?” The poorly educated dairyman replied, “If you mean by voluntary contribution, she don’t give none, but if you can get her cornered, so she can’t kick none, an able-bodied man can take away eleven quarts a day.” Like the sun was made to shine and apple trees were made to produce apples, cows were designed to give milk naturally. At the same time, it has to be collected.

**Summary:** Since the Corinthians were ready and willing to give and their readiness had been made known, Paul sent a delegation to collect and in so doing, prevent both his and their embarrassment.

While not speaking directly to the issue of a professional fundraiser, this passage discusses collecting funds. Thus, the principle of it can be applied to fundraising. When applied, these principles make fundraising Christian. What are the principles?

First and foremost, all Christian fundraising should be done willingly. It should not be “a grudging obligation” (9:5). It should be done “willingly” (9:2) and “as a matter of generosity” (9:5).

While all Christian giving is done willingly, there is a legitimate sense in which there can be “fundraising.” In these chapters, Paul is writing to the Corinthians to raise funds! He even sent a group to collect those funds (8:16-24; 9:5). So what tactics and procedures can those fundraisers use?

Some techniques of fundraising are legitimate. It is perfectly proper to make a promise to give money. Paul told the Corinthians about the need of the poor saints in Jerusalem and that a collection would be taken for them (1 Cor. 16:1-4). The Corinthians made a promise to give. He specifically says they had “previously promised” (9:5; see also 8:10). He even wrote and told them to pay their pledge (8:11). This procedure does not violate in any way a person’s willingness or readiness to give (8:11).

Professional fundraisers often use testimonials to motivate people to give. From this extended passage in 2 Corinthians, it is apparent that that is a legitimate fundraising technique. When the Corinthians promised to give, Paul used their example to stir up the Macedonians (9:2). A year later, he used the Macedonians to motivate the Corinthians to finish what they had started (8:1-8). It is legitimate for a Christian to give a testimony saying I have given generously and even sacrificially and for a fundraiser to use that to motivate others to give.

Many feel that fundraising campaigns put pressure on people and embarrass them. As we have seen from this passage, all giving must be done willingly. However, letting a need be known, asking directly for money, getting people to promise to do it, and even telling them to complete their promise and sending someone to collect it is not a violation of the willingness principle. In fact, the apostle Paul went so far as to say I don’t want you or me to be



embarrassed, and that's why I'm doing all of this (9:4). Notice outsiders come to do this! Perhaps we ought to be more concerned about not being embarrassed at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Jn. 2:28).

We're all comfortable talking about giving in very general philosophical terms, but what the apostle Paul is doing in this passage is bringing the discussion down to specific concrete terms. Like the cow designed to give milk, many believers need help doing what they were designed to do.

The pastor of a small country church launched a fundraising drive. In talking with one of his parishioners, he said, "If you had two farms, would you be willing to give one to the Lord?" "Why certainly," replied the farmer, "no question about it. I only wish I was in a position to do just that." The pastor asked, "If you had \$10,000, would you give \$5,000 to the Lord's work?" Without hesitation, the Christian farmer replied, "I'd love to have that kind of money. I'd enjoy giving generously like that." Then, the pastor got specific. He said, "If you had two pigs, would you give one of them to the church?" The farmer hesitated momentarily and blurted out, "That's not fair. You know I've got two pigs."

While that is only a story, it illustrates that we're willing to talk theoretically about what we would like to do when it comes to giving. What we need to do is be willing to actually give. Sometimes we must be reminded to do what we should do.

## THE RESULTS OF GIVING

Imagine sitting in a service listening to a sermon on giving. You think I ought to give more, but I can't. I have bills to pay. No matter how much I would like to, I have no more money to give.

What is the result of giving? Is it that you lose the money you give? Is it that you lose financially but gain spiritually? Is it that you lose now but gain later in eternity? What are the consequences of giving beyond you personally? Are the results worth the price? Paul describes the right way to give and the result of that giving in 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

### Give Freely and Generously

*Bountifully* Having explained why he is sending a delegation to collect their gift (8:16-9:5, esp. 8:20-21; 9:4), Paul turns to the motive for giving: “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (9:6). The “law of the harvest” is referred to repeatedly throughout the Scripture (Prov. 11:24-25; 19:17; Lk. 6:38; Gal. 6:7). Paul applies it to giving. Giving is like sowing seed. If the sower only plants a small amount of seed, he will harvest only a small crop. On the other hand, if he sows a great deal of seed, he will reap an abundant crop. It is the law of the harvest. The harvest is determined by the amount of seed sown. Giving is in the highest interest of the donor (Tasker). Plummer says the reward is hereafter. A pastor friend of mine puts it like this: You reap what you sow. You reap more than you sow. You reap later than you sow.

People often do not give more because they are afraid. A traveling salesman got lost in a rural area. He stopped to ask directions from a man who looked like a farmer. After receiving the information he needed, he asked the farmer, “How is your cotton?” “Ain't got none,” replied the farmer. The salesman continued, “Did you plant any?” The man responded, “Nope, 'fraid of boll weevils.” The visitor persisted, “How is your corn doing?” “Didn't plant none. 'fraid it wasn't going to rain.” Then the salesman asked, “How are your potatoes?” Again came the reply, “Ain't got none. Scared of potato bugs.” A bit perplexed, the salesman inquired, “What did you plant?” The farmer responded, “Nothing, I just played it safe.”

*Cheerfully* “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity” (9:7a). Believers are to purpose in their hearts what they want to give. Paul wants everyone to give generously (9:6), but he wants this gift to be given freely (9:7). Knowing the law of the harvest, you decide what you want to give.

Giving should not be done grudgingly. The Greek word rendered “grudgingly” means “grief, sorrow.” No one should give feeling sorry over the loss of money. Hughes says, “To part with money in a charitable cause and then grieve over its loss is not to give but to grudge.” Nor should giving be “of necessity,” a Greek word that means “compelled or forced.” Tasker says, “Giving must be free and deliberate, not compulsory or causal.”

Paul explains, “For God loves a cheerful giver” (9:7b). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this is added to Proverbs 22:8. The Greek word translated “cheerful” means joyous. It is the Greek word from which we get the English word hilarious. God wants the believer to give cheerfully, not out of compulsion, regretting the gift.

A wealthy man sent a check for \$5,000 to his future son-in-law as a wedding present. He had someone hand-deliver the check to the young man. When the courier returned, the wealthy man asked, "What did he say when you gave him the check?" "He didn't say anything, but when he looked at it, he began to cry," was the report. "How long did he cry?" asked the rich father-in-law. "Oh, about a minute," was the response. "Only a minute?" roared the disappointed giver. "Why I cried for an hour after I signed that check.

*God will Work* Give abundantly, willingly, and cheerfully "and God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work" (9:8). God gives to the willing, cheerful, generous giver. Notice the repetition of the word "all." God gives *all* grace so that you at *all* times have *all* sufficiency in *all* things and abound in *all* good works. Instead of giving and having your resources decrease so that there may be a time when you don't have money to perform any good works, God is able to give you more at all times so that you can perform other good works. In other words, God is able to see to it that the generous givers will not suffer lack but will have their needs met and have enough money left over for generous participation in every good work.

Charles Hodge comments, "From this verse to the 11<sup>th</sup>, the apostle assumes that the liberal and cheerful giver will always have something to give. Giving is, to the natural eye, the way to lessen one's store, not to increase it. The Bible says it is the way to increase it. To believe this, it is only necessary to believe in the power, providence and promise of God. God is able to make the paradox, 'He that scattereth, increaseth,' prove true. God is able to make all grace abound: Charin (a Greek word), favor, gift, whether temporal or spiritual or both, depends on the context. Here the reference is clearly to earthly good; the kind of good or favor is intended, which enables those who receive it to give abundantly. The idea, therefore, obviously is, "God is able to increase your wealth.... He 'is able to make every grace abound unto you.' He can give the desire to be generous and the means of being generous. It is especially the latter that is meant here.... The man with an abundant heart finds that God supplies him with something to bestow."

To support his claim, Paul quotes Scripture, "As it is written He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever" (9:9). This is a quotation from Psalm 112:9. Psalm 112 describes the God-fearing man (112:1) who trusts the Lord (112:7). He is not afraid of evil tidings (112:7), that is, bad news like financial losses. Instead, he generously disburses to the poor, and his righteous acts are remembered forever.

In the center of the city of Bath, England, stands a stone marker in honor of the city's medical waters. The inscription reads, "These healing waters have flowed on from time immemorial. Their virtue is unimpaired, their heat undiminished, their volume unabated. They explain the origin, account for the purpose, and demand the gratitude of the city of Bath." That's God's monument to a gracious, generous giver.

Paul expresses a prayer that what God can do, He will do in their case. "Now may he who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness" (9:10). The words "supply seed to the sower and bread for food" are adapted from Isaiah 55:10. The latter part of the verse is a reflection of Hosea 10:12. Paul prays that the God who supplies seed and harvest ("bread") will supply and even multiply the seed they have sown, that is, provide what they gave and even more besides, plus increase the fruit of their righteous act of giving. It is Paul's prayer that God supply bread, that is, their personal need and seed, that is, money for them to give to others. Furthermore, he desires that God will increase the fruit, that is, the effect of their giving (Hodge).

Let me illustrate. Suppose I plant a single seed. From that seed, a tree may come from which could come much fruit and even more trees. Paul's prayer is that such a thing would happen

when they gave. Indeed their willingness to give stirred up others to give, which is the fruit of their righteousness (9:2).

William Jennings Bryan tells of obtaining a handful of watermelon seeds. Upon having them weighed, he discovered it would take 5,000 seeds to make one pound, yet one single seed planted in the ground could produce a watermelon of 50 pounds or 250,000 times the weight of the planted seed. Under the influence of the sun and rain, a little seed releases its life into the plant and forces the elements to grow a 50-pound watermelon through a tiny stem only a quarter of an inch in diameter! God is able to do something similar with our gifts.

## The Result will be Blessing

*Benefit to the Giver* Grammatically, verse 11 is connected to verse 10, but beginning with verse 11, Paul describes the fruit, that is, the result of giving. He says, “While you are enriched in everything for all liberality” (9:11a). First, the giver is enriched. His enrichment is “for all liberality,” God gives to the giver so that the giver has more to give (Tasker).

Dr. F. W. Boreham told of an old sailor who, when he retired, joined the staff of a mission where he had been converted. The mission was located in a depressed area. Sam decided that he would distribute pictures to all the homes in the neighborhood with a verse or motto pasted on the bottom of each one. One evening, during a service at the mission, a hymn was sung that caught Sam’s attention. The words read, “Have you on the Lord believed, still, there’s more to follow, of His grace have you received, still, there’s more to follow.” “Ah,” he said to himself, “that’s a perfect line for some picture.” The next day, he began to search for the right one. It wasn’t long until he found just what he was looking for. A beautiful color photo of Niagara Falls. Upon purchasing it, he put the motto at the bottom, “More to follow.” Like the ceaseless cascading waterfall, the limitless supply of God will ever flow.

*Benefit to the Recipient* Although not a major point in this section, Paul speaks of the gift supplying “the need of the saints” (9:12). Giving enriches the recipient as well as the giver. Two women walking down the street came to a corner where a charity representative was soliciting donations to help feed needy children. One of the women pledged a large contribution to the collection box. A companion, remembering that the woman had recently promised to make such a gift, said with a chuckle, “I’m glad you did that; now your conscience is clear.” Her friend quietly responded, “I wasn’t thinking about my conscience but about those starving children.”

The giver thinks about the recipient of the gift, but the recipient is benefited.

*Blessing to God* Paul adds, “Which causes thanksgiving through us to God” (9:11b). Not only is the giver enriched, but God is praised. Paul inserts “through us” because it was through him and men like Titus that the Corinthians were motivated to give (see Hodge).

Paul explains, “For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God” (9:12). Their giving is a service that not only helps to meet the needs of the saints in Jerusalem, but it is also “abounding” (Greek: “overflowing”) in many thanksgivings to God in heaven. As the next verse indicates, the many who praise God are the recipients of the gift.

The sentence begun in verse 12 continues, “While, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you” (9:13-14). Paul foresees this proof of their service, their financial gift, causing the Jerusalem saints to praise God for 1) the genuineness of the

Corinthian's confession of the gospel, 2) the generous sharing of the Corinthians not only with them but with "all men." Moreover, he anticipates that the Jerusalem saints will pray for the Corinthian believers and be deeply concerned about them because God's great grace works in their lives. The givers are enriched (9:11) and prayed for by the recipients of the gift (9:14).

The overall point of verses 11b-14 is that God is praised. Paul himself bursts forth with a doxology to God, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (9:15). To which "gift" does Paul refer? Some insist that the gift is God's Son (Kruse), while others say it is the Corinthian's gift or the gift of unity between Jews and Gentiles (Plummer). The gift of which Paul speaks here is indescribable. He *describes* the gift of the Corinthians and the unity of believers. What is beyond language to describe is the gift of Jesus Christ, but as Tasker says, that is the divine gift that inspires all gifts (Tasker).

**Summary:** The result of giving freely and generously as unto the Lord is that you, others, and God Himself will be blessed.

For two chapters, Paul admonished the Corinthians to give toward the collection to the poor saints at Jerusalem. Luther said, "As often as I read the admonitions of the apostle to the effect that the churches should support their pastors and raise funds for the relief of impoverished Christians, I am half-ashamed to think that the great apostle Paul had to touch upon this subject so frequently. In writing to the Corinthians, he needed two chapters to impress this matter upon them. I would not want to discredit Wittenberg as Paul discredited the Corinthians by urging them at such length to contribute to the relief of the poor. It seems to be a by-product of the gospel that nobody wants to contribute to the maintenance of the gospel ministry. When the doctrine of the devil is preached, people are prodigal in their willing support of those who deceive them" (Luther, Commentary on Galatians, p. 243).

Yet, a modern commentator pointed out, "Paul's confidence that the Corinthians would contribute to the collection was finally rewarded when the apostle wrote Romans during his three-month stay in Greece. After the problems in 2 Corinthians had been settled, for the time being, he was able to say, "At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints from Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make their contribution" (Kruse; Rom. 15:25-26; Acts 24:17-21).

You can keep your money, spend it on yourself, and have it all go up in smoke at the Judgment Seat of Christ. You will "gain" in time and lose in eternity, or you can give as unto the Lord and benefit financially and spiritually now and in eternity. You will benefit others and bless God. The fear is that we will not have enough money left over. One of the points Paul makes in this passage is that God is able to see to it that you will have enough for good works in the future. God will not only take care of you, He will see to it that you have enough to give as well.

I once received a letter that said, "Just wanted to share a few blessings with you. In the first years of our marriage, we were not always faithful in giving tithes and offerings, but we have always known you cannot out-give the Lord. We benefit from the radio program and consider it a privilege and a responsibility to help support it, but you always make us feel our \$20.00 is a million. We had the Webers over for Sunday dinner during the missionary Conference and increased our missionary giving so we could help with their support. Then, with our work schedules and me being sick, we lost track of the time they would be leaving. When we came to the service on July 1<sup>st</sup>, we found out they were leaving the next day. We had planned to give them some money to help with travel expenses. Thank God for "Ready Teller;" we withdrew \$200.00 and gave it to them. On Tuesday, we received a check in the mail for \$196.00 from an escrow company. We had refinanced a loan three years ago. We bought gifts for the missionary

shower in July that cost about \$90.00. A few days later, we received a check for \$94.00. We had overpaid a bill. It is exciting to see how God will grant us good health so we can continue to work at our jobs and give. We would also greatly appreciate your prayers for our son Victor and his family. We are thankful for the Church of the Open Door and what it has done for our son Roland and us.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said, "Everybody sooner or later sits down to a banquet of consequences."

## PAUL AND HIS CRITICS

A church in need of a pastor appointed a search committee. A committee member read a letter from a prospective applicant to the committee. It said: “Understanding that your pulpit is vacant, I would like to apply for the position. I have many qualifications I think you would appreciate. I preach with power and have had some success as a writer. Some say that I am a good organizer. I have been a leader in most places I have gone. Some folks, however, have some things against me. I am over fifty years of age. I have never preached in one place for more than three years. In some places, I have been driven out of town after my work caused riots and disturbances. I have to admit that I have been in jail three or four times, but not because of any real wrongdoing. My health is not too good and I have had to work at my trade to help pay my way. The churches I have preached in have been small, though they are located in several large cities. I have not gotten on too well with the religious leaders in the towns where I have preached. In fact, some of them have threatened me and even attacked me physically. I am not good at keeping records. I have even been known to forget whom I baptized. However, if you can use me, I shall do my best for you, even if I have to work to help with my support.”

Upon hearing the letter, a committee member objected to the applicant, saying they did not want an unhealthy, contentious, trouble-making, absent-minded ex-jailbird as a pastor. The letter was written by the apostle Paul.

Everyone gets criticized. Even Jesus Christ had His critics (and still does). God, Himself is not without opposition. So, it is not surprising that the apostle Paul and believers should be criticized. What was the criticism against Paul? Why was it given and how did he answer it? Understanding the criticism against Paul and how he responded to it will enable us to handle criticism hurled at us today.

### Paul’s Warfare

*Paul’s Warfare* Having concluded the discussion concerning the collection, Paul now turns to his coming visit: “Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you. But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh” (10:1-2). Paul began this epistle with Timothy (1:1). Now the dual authorship is abandoned and Paul personally addresses the Corinthians. By adding the word “myself,” he emphasizes that he is now speaking personally.

Apparently, Paul’s critics charged him with being humble when he was present with them and bold when he was absent and writing a letter. They also accused him of walking according to the flesh (Plummer; Hodge). “Flesh” in the New Testament can refer to the physical body or the sinful, selfish self. Here, it is a reference to the latter. In other words, Paul’s critics charged that he lived for himself. In chapter 1, he dealt with the charge that he had planned to come to them (1:15) but did not make it as originally planned (2:1-4). In the midst of that discussion, he said, “Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No with me? (1:17). Was he only thinking of himself when he didn’t come to them as promised? Apparently, that was the charge against him.

If his failure to come as promised was the basis for the criticism that he lived according to the flesh, his opponents jumped to the conclusion that was false. Isn't much criticism like that? A husband is late a few times and his wife says, "He is always late." A wife exceeds the budget a few times and her husband complains, "She always spends too much money!"

Paul answers his critics (10:3-5), but he makes a request before he does. He says he is "pleading" (10:1, Greek: "exhorting") and he says "I beg" (10:2; Greek: "request") "that when I am present, I may not be bold." In other words, he is asking the Corinthians to deal with his critics before he arrives (10:2). He adds that when he comes, if they have not dealt with these critics, he will be bold (10:2). Paul gently requests that they deal with his critics before he comes so that he will not have to be stern with them when he arrives (Hughes).

In fact, he pleads with them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Meekness is not weakness; it is "strength under control." It is a mild spirit that is the opposite of an outburst of anger. On the judge's part, it meant sentencing an offender with more leniency than the law prescribed (Kruse). Tasker remarks that the meekness of Jesus was preeminently shown in His submission to the wrongs inflicted upon Him. Gentleness is fairness and reasonableness. Aristotle used it to describe a judge recognizing that circumstances alter cases (Tasker, see fn. for more). Christ was meek and gentle (Mt. 11:29) and Paul pleads with the Corinthians in the same spirit.

Both Christ and Paul were meek and gentle, but that does not mean that they were weak, wishy-washy, or milquetoast. When the situation demands, they both can be stern and even angry. John Calvin wrote, "It is the duty of a good pastor to draw his sheep on calmly and kindly so that many suffer themselves to be governed, rather than to coerce them with violence. I acknowledge, indeed, that severity is sometimes necessary, but we must always set out with gentleness and persevere in it so long as the hearer shows himself tractable. Severity is the extreme remedy.... For as men should be drawn, so far as in our power, rather than drive, so, when mildness proves to be ineffective with those who are hard and retractors, it then becomes necessary to resort to rigor; otherwise, it will not be moderation, or impartiality, but culpable cowardice" (Calvin, cited by Hughes).

*Paul's Explanation* Paul speaks to the charge leveled against him, saying, "For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh" (10:3). Paul explains (see "for") that he walks, that is, lives in the flesh. "Flesh" in that sense is the body, the earthen vessel (4:7), the outward man (4:16), our earthly house (5:1), but he insists that he does not war according to the flesh. "Flesh" in this latter sense is opposite to the spirit (Gal. 5:17), opposite of that which is godly. He did not conduct his ministry in a self-serving way that was opposite to what God Himself is like. He was not guided by the influence of the corrupt nature (Hodge).

As he explains, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (10:4-5). These verses describe Paul's warfare. He was at war with the human "arguments" and "thoughts" of the false teachers who had influenced the believers at Corinthian. He discusses his weapons and their fortress.

Paul says that his weapons were not carnal, a Greek word that means "flesh." Tasker says carnal weapons are such things as "human cleverness or ingenuity, organizing ability, eloquent diatribe, powerful propaganda, or reliance on charm or forcefulness of personality." Hughes says carnal weapons are such things as human wisdom and philosophy, the attraction of secular entertainment, and displays of massive organizations. Rather, Paul's weapons were "mighty in God." He did not rely on human resources (Hodge). He depended on the power of God.



Paul uses the figure of a fortress to describe his fight. His aim is the destruction of strongholds, the casting down of towers, and the taking of captives. Corinth itself had a stronghold, a fortress. Overlooking ancient Corinth was a hill 1,857 feet high. On the top was a stronghold. In 146 BC, it was conquered. Paul, of course, is using the term figuratively, not literally. The stronghold is the fortress itself. The “high thing” is the tower. Once these are destroyed, captives are taken.

What does all this mean? The fortress, towers, and captives are figures for “arguments” and “thoughts.” The word “arguments” means “reasoning,” “thought.” Men defend themselves against the knowledge of God by erecting reasonings and rationalizations. These Paul desires to cast down. His aim is not only to destroy the strongholds and cast down towers, he also means to take prisoners captive. The prisoners to be taken captive are the “thoughts.” A Greek word that means “mind, thought, perception” (3:14; 4:4) or even “intention, device” or “scheme” (2:11; see Hughes, fn., pp. 353-354). Every such “thought” is to be brought into obedience to Christ.

Some commentators say that the people Paul means to defeat those who oppose the gospel, who felt protected in the mental fortress they occupied (Hodge; Tasker; Hughes). Hughes also says this applies to Christians at Corinthian, who the false apostles were deceiving. He says the philosophies of the “natural” man can influence the “redeemed intellect.” In other words, Paul is *not talking about his thoughts*. He is talking about human reasoning taught by the false apostles.

Could this apply to what believers need to do with their own human reasoning? If Paul is fighting human reasoning in the believers at Corinthian, do they not at some point have to battle their thoughts? In discussing this passage, Tasker says Christians fight a losing battle against temptation if they try to fight evil in their own strength.

In Galatians 5:16, Paul wrote, “I say, then: walk in the spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Perhaps 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 explains the mechanics of how not to “walk according to the flesh” (10:2) and “war according to the flesh” (10:3). The key is the words “arguments” and “every thought.” These words describe the reasonings and rationalizations, the perceptions and intentions of the believer’s heart against God. These devices must be pulled down, cast down, and taken into captivity. In other words, believers have a sinful side that argues for living a selfish, sinful life. To combat that and not walk or war in the flesh, they must “talk to themselves” and debate until those ideas and concepts are defeated and those that honor the Lord win out in their life.

As an employee, a believer may reason, “I can take things from my employer because he does not pay me enough” or “because everyone does it.” Such perceptions and rationalization must be destroyed so the believer does not walk according to the flesh.

Paul adds, “**And being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled” (10:6)**. The word rendered “punish” was a legal expression meaning “to do justice” (Plummer). In context, this verse seems to be saying that after Paul destroyed strongholds, cast down towers, and took prisoners, he was prepared to punish all disobedience provided the obedience of the Christians was complete.

What is the meaning of all of this? The Corinthians had been obedient (7:14, 16). Paul urged them to complete the collection before he came (8:11; 9:5). In the meantime, Paul assured them that he was not warring according to the flesh as he had been charged. Now, when they complete the collection and having not walked according to the flesh, will deal with the disobedience “of some” when he comes (10:2).

Thus, Paul answers his critics by assuring them that he did not war according to the flesh and that he was ready to punish disobedience as an apostle. When criticized for not applying the Word to himself, Paul assures them that he did and would apply it to his critics.

## Paul's Authority

*Paul's Authority* There were other charges leveled against Paul to which he now speaks, “Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?” (10:7a). In the Greek text, the word “look” could either be indicative or imperative. Thus, this sentence could be a simple statement, “you are looking” (NIV; Plummer), an imperative as in “look” (RSV; Hodge; Tasker), or as it is here as a question (NKJV). Regardless of the way the sentence is constructed, the idea is some were judging Paul by his appearance. Later, Paul writes, “They say” (10:10). Perhaps his critics were saying something like, “He writes like one who has great authority, but in person, he is a meek man (10:10). He intimidates people with his letters (10:9), but he is a weak man with no authority when he is personally present (10:10).”

Paul asserts, “If anyone is convicted in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so, we are Christ's” (10:7b). What does Paul mean by being “Christ's?” In this context, it seems to be more than belonging to Christ as His child. The next verse, which explains this one (see “for”), deals with authority (10:8). Therefore, to be Christ's here means to be His servant or His apostle (see Plummer). Those who are convicted that they have authority are the “false apostles” of chapter 11 (11:13). Paul is saying here that he has as much evidence of his authority as anyone else may think he has (Hodge).

As Paul explains, “For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for our own destruction, I shall not be ashamed—lest I seem to be terrified by your letters” (10:8-9). Even if Paul boasted about his authority more than he had (10:7; 10:2, 6), he was not ashamed. The facts would not embarrass him (Tasker). His authority was given to him to build them up, not tear them down (he repeats this in 13:10). He only tore down the strongholds.

The last clause in verse 9, “lest I seem to be terrified by your letters,” should be translated, “that I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters” (KJV; NASB: NIV). This comment will be explained in verse 10. The point in verses 7-9 is that Paul had the authority to build up the saints. As a believer in Christ, so do you. As believers, we must speak what is good for “necessary edification” (Eph. 4:29).

*Paul's Explanation* In verses 7-9, Paul is dealing with the charge that he does not have authority. Now he introduces the specifics of what was said about him. ““For his letters,” they say, ‘are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible’” (10:10). Paul's critics said his letters were heavy, severe, and strong. His letters were intimidating (10:9), but they said his bodily presence was weak. “Bodily presence” is probably not a reference to his physical appearance but rather his personal presence (Plummer; Hodge). They said that his pen was strong, but he was without strength in person.

Moreover, they said his speech was contemptible. The Greek word translated “contemptible” means “to set at naught, despise utterly, treat with contempt.” They despised his speech and treated it with contempt. To them, it was ineffective, of no account. Perhaps they interpreted his meekness as weakness and his gentleness as a lack of strength and courage (10:1). At any rate, they accused him of acting like he had authority when he wrote but being a wimp when he arrived. They felt he was bold as a lion on paper and timid as a rabbit in person.

Paul's response is, “Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present” (10:11). Paul promises that what his critics think of what he is like when he writes is what he will be like when he comes. He will come with authority (10:8) and strength (10:10).

In Corinth, Paul was criticized for being a weak person (10:10), who walked and warred according to the flesh (10:2-3) and who was a deplorable speaker who wrote bold letters (10:10) that intimidated people (10:9). They questioned his integrity, his authority, and his manner of ministry. Paul asserts that he does not walk or war according to the flesh (10:4-5) and that while he does aspire to be meek and gentle like Christ (10:1), he does have authority (10:8), and he will use it to deal with the disobedience when he comes (10:6, 11). To that, he adds something else.

## Paul's Boast

*Paul's Boast* Paul has asserted his authority (10:7-11). He now explains what he is not and what he is doing (10:12-18). "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (10:12). The word rendered "dare" means "to venture, to be bold." Paul says he would not be so bold as to put himself in the same class or even compare himself with those who commended themselves. This is, of course, sarcasm (Plummer). He had been accused of praising himself (3:1). Paul says anyone who would measure himself by his own personal opinion or by comparing himself to others is not wise.

In fact, unlike the false prophets whose conceit knows no bounds, Paul kept his boasting within clearly defined limits (Tasker). "But we will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you" (10:13). The Greek word translated "beyond measure" means "without measure, exceedingly." Paul did not exceed the proper limits in his boasting. Instead, Paul could say he boasts only within the ministry God had given him, including the Corinthians. Paul could legitimately brag about his accomplishments at Corinth because God had given him that ministry.

*Paul's Explanation* Paul explains, "For we are not extending ourselves beyond our sphere (thus not reaching you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ" (10:14). In bringing the gospel to Corinth, Paul did not extend his ministry beyond the limits God gave him. Therefore, he was not boasting beyond proper limits.

Paul continues, "not boasting with things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope that as your faith is increased, we should be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment" (10:15-16). His ministry was not to preach the gospel where others had preached but to preach the gospel where no one else had labored. In fact, as their faith matured, Paul hoped to preach beyond Corinth. In Romans, which was written about this time in Paul's life, he said his ambition was to preach the gospel in Spain (Rom. 15:24). If his limit extended beyond Corinth, it certainly included Corinth. These statements imply that Paul's opponents did what Paul did not do. They prepared themselves, measured themselves by others, and excessively bragged about what they had done (10:13). They extended themselves beyond what they should have (10:14), boasting in labor (10:15), and accomplishments of others (10:16). If so, they were practicing projection.

Paul concludes by quoting Scripture, "But he who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (10:17). This is a quotation from Jeremiah 9:24 (1 Cor. 1:31). Anyone who boasts should boast about what God has done in his life or through him.

As Paul explains, that means, "For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (10:18). Paul began this subsection by saying he did not put himself in that group that commended themselves (10:12). Now he concludes by pointing out that the one who

is approved is not the one who commends himself but the one whom the Lord commends. Therefore, he would glory and boast only in what the Lord had done.

A young man with talent at playing the French horn assumed he could teach himself all he needed to know. He could play better than his peers and he was improving, but his parents knew better. They took him to a master of the French horn. The older man listened to him play. Then he motioned for the horn. He played as the young fellow had never heard. That young, aspiring musician never compared himself again, either to his past performance or his peers. From then on, his goal was to play like the old master. Paul compared himself to the Master.

**Summary:** Paul did not walk or war according to the flesh, nor did he commend himself or boast exceedingly, but he had authority and could legitimately boast in the Lord and thus, he was ready to punish disobedience when he came to Corinth.

Paul was boasting in his God-given authority when he said he would be bold in person and as he was on paper in dealing with disobedience.

From this passage, we need to learn not to be like Paul's critics. Don't jump to conclusions until you have all the facts first. Don't question authority, just to question authority. Don't project your faults onto others.

We can also learn to confront criticism like Paul. Sometimes, Paul did not answer his opponents—he left town. On other occasions like this, he chose to answer charges against him. He did so when the charges against him could affect the spiritual life of others (1 Thess. 2).

The other great lesson here is that Paul was meek, gentle, mild yet confident and courageous. In the spirit of Christ's gentleness (10:1), he boldly declared (10:2) his innocence of charges (10:3-5) and his intent to deal with disobedience (10:2, 6, 11). All believers need the balance between firmness and fairness, gentleness and sternness. Parents need it when dealing with their children, and pastors need it when dealing with people. Perhaps it should be added that the meekness and gentle side should be the dominant side and that even in the sternness, there can be gentleness.

Christ was the example. He was described as meek and gentle, yet drove the moneychangers from the Temple. He did not seem meek and mild-mannered as He wielded the whip and overturned the tables. Yet, His gentleness was seen even in the midst of that scene, especially in how He handled the doves. Had He kicked over their cages, they might have been injured, so He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away" (Jn. 2:16).

## FINANCIALLY ABOVE REPROACH

An evangelist and faith healer once offered twelve monthly blessings for \$84.00. Those wanting him to pray for them were to fill out a coupon and mail him \$7.00 a month for a year. His promotional material said, “Write us every month and tell us what you need from God.” He promised to pray for those who paid and hinted that his prayers had brought others financial rewards. With the first installment, one would receive a blessing certificate to hang on the wall. With the second came an “anointed billfold,” the evangelist claimed he had prayed over for prosperity. A newspaper reporter wrote, “You can now buy blessings on the installment plan.... There is no money-back guarantee.”

The financial exploitation of some religious leaders has brought skepticism and criticism and rightly so. Such criticism is often earned. The problem, however, is that such activity causes suspicion when it is not deserved. All religious leaders and even religious people become suspects. That even happened to the apostle Paul. There were religious teachers in his day who were “in it for the money.” In that climate, it was only natural that he, too, would be under suspicion. To further complicate the situation, there was a time when his personal integrity was challenged. At the time, he was collecting money for the poor saints in Jerusalem. It made Paul “look bad.” Here was an itinerant teacher charged with not keeping his word and living for himself, and he was collecting money all over the Roman Empire.

Paul responded to this situation by directly answering the specific charges (see chapters 1, 2, 10) and appointing several others to handle the funds (8:16-24). Then, he spoke explicitly about his financial dealings (11:1-15). Knowing how Paul dealt with this situation is important to us not only to learn spiritual truths for our own lives but also to know how to answer critics who level this kind of charge against Christianity.

### Endure My Boast

Paul’s opponents criticized him (10:2, 10) and commended themselves (10:12, 18). Paul insisted that he did not commend himself (10:12), but he did boast concerning the ministry God had given him (10:13). Now he asks them to bear with him (11:1-6) while he boasts (11:7-15).

Paul exclaims, “Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me” (11:1). The word Greek rendered “bear” means “to endure.” Paul is about to brag, an activity he calls a little folly, and he wishes they would endure this folly. Then he says that the Corinthians do indeed endure him. They have been doing so throughout the last chapter! (10:2, 8) He gives three reasons for this boast.

*Paul’s Love* The first reason Paul asks for their further indulgence is he is deeply concerned about them. “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy” (11:2a). Paul loved them and was jealous for them, but his jealousy was “not a merely human jealousy, a selfish possessiveness (Hughes). It was jealousy that was “of God.” It was the jealousy God has for His people.

Paul explains his jealousy, “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (11:2b). Ancient Jewish marriages consisted of a betrothal period climaxed by the wedding ceremony. It was like an engagement period followed by the wedding, except in the Jewish custom, the betrothal period usually lasted a year, and the girl was legally considered the man’s wife. The betrothal could be broken by death or divorce. The marriage was

not consummated until after the marriage. Until then, the girl remained a virgin. Paul uses the imagery to explain that as their father (1 Cor. 4:15; Tasker), he has betrothed them to Christ to present them as a chaste virgin when Christ returns (Hodge). As their father, he had every right to be jealous. His jealousy was not selfish; it was not that he was concerned about himself. He was deeply concerned about them.

*Paul's Concern* As their spiritual father, Paul had a legitimate concern, "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (11:3). In the Greek text, the phrase "in Christ" is "toward Christ." Paul was afraid that Satan might corrupt, that is, destroy their minds from the sincerity and the simplicity that they had toward Christ as he cleverly deceived Eve. The Greek word translated "simplicity" has been used in 2 Corinthians for sincerity (1:12) and generosity (8:2, 9, 11, 13). They had a sincere singleness of heart toward Christ, which would express itself in generosity. Satan would like nothing better than to deceive them, that is, get them to believe something not true and thus destroy that genuine attitude toward the Lord. One practical effect would be to kill their commitment to completing the collection.

The next verse begins with "for" (11:4). In one sense, verse 4 explains the fear expressed in verse 3. It also explains why they should bear with Paul's boasting (11:1; Plummer; Hodge). "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!" (11:4). Paul was concerned. He desired that they endure his boast because they seemed willing to receive (Greek: "endure") those who preached another gospel. Paul uses the word "endure" to describe what he asked them to do with his boasting (see "bear" in 11:1) and what they were willing to do with false teachers (see "receive"). Since they were willing to give an excellent hearing to false teachers, why not listen to Paul's boasting?

Paul only contemplates the hypothetical possibility (see "if;" Tasker) of someone coming with a different message and deceiving the Corinthians. Thus, the specifics of another Jesus, another spirit, and a different gospel are not delineated. Any Jesus, spirit, or gospel other than the one Paul preached would be included. Another Jesus would be man, not God or crucified, but not risen. A different spirit would be one of fear, not of faith (4:13), of bondage, not freedom (Gal. 5:1; 2 Cor. 3:17). A different gospel would be one of law, not grace, or one of works, not faith.

False preachers are peddling a false Jesus and false gospel today. For example, Unitarians teach that Jesus Christ was an extraordinarily good man, not God in the flesh. Christian Scientists say He was only a Divine Idea. Jehovah's Witnesses contend that He was Michael, the Archangel, while Mormons preach that Jesus was one god among many gods. Spiritualists proclaim that Jesus is an advanced medium and witches say He was a super witch.

Satan can deceive believers with cunning craftiness, as the famous British art critic Duveen deceived his little daughter. He was trying to get her to go swimming in the ocean, which was rather chilly. She refused to go, so he built a fire on the beach, heated a teakettle of water, and poured the steaming water into the ocean with great flourish. The child gleefully ran into the water without hesitation. Of course, his one teakettle of water had not warmed the ocean at all, but he deceived his little girl into thinking that he had. Similarly, Satan can deceive the minds of believers, even toward Christ. Calvin calls "he who comes" a false apostle (see also Clarke).

Apparently, the Corinthians were willing to endure such false teachers. Paul pleads with them to endure him since they were willing to endure such false teaching (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker). Later in the passage, Paul refers to the false apostles (11:13-15). The "he who comes" in this verse is one such false apostle. Satan's work is mentioned in connection with both the "he

who comes” here and the false apostles mentioned later (*cf.* 11:3 with 11:14). In both cases, deception is mentioned (11:3, 11:13).

*Paul’s Position* Paul gives a third reason why they should bear with his boasting, “For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles” (11:5). The “for” of verse 5 relates to verse 1, not verse 4. The Corinthians should bear with his boasting because he was not inferior to even the most eminent apostles. Who are the eminent apostles? If verse 5 is related to verse 1, the apostles referred to are the twelve (Hodge). Many, however, say verse 5 is related to verse 4, so Paul has the false apostles in mind (Plummer; Tasker; Hughes). The reference to the “eminent apostles” later in the book (12:11) seems to be a reference to the genuine apostles (12:12). Perhaps Paul’s opponents compared Paul with the twelve, especially men like Peter, who had lived and labored with the Lord when He was on the earth (5:16).

In his defense, Paul says, “Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge but we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things” (11:6). By “untrained in speech,” Paul means he was not schooled in Greek oratory (Tasker). This does not mean that Paul was a poor speaker, only that he was not trained in professional rhetoric (Tasker).

What he did not lack was knowledge. He had received direct revelation from the Lord Himself (Gal. 1:11-12) and that fact was fully manifest to them. In the Greek text of this verse, “in all” appears twice. Once it is rendered “thoroughly” and the second time, it is translated “in all things.” This verse probably means Paul’s knowledge was manifest “in every way in all manners,” although some would translate it “in every way among all men (Hughes).

## Paul Receives Support from Others

*Paul’s Practice* After pleading with them to endure his boast (11:1-6), Paul states it in the form of a question: “Did I commit sin in abasing myself that you might be exalted because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?” (11:7). In Paul’s day professional philosophers and teachers in Greek society charged for teaching (Plummer). Paul did not. He humbled himself to manual labor (1 Thess. 2:9) and to receive support from other churches (11:8) so that the Corinthians could be raised to the exalted position of hearing the gospel without charge. Now, he asks if he sinned in preaching God’s gospel freely. In the Greek text, “God” is emphatic. He preached without charge, but it was God’s gospel he gave them.

Paul answers their question concerning sin: “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you” (11:8). His sin was robbery! By robbery, he means he received support from churches, but instead of serving them, he ministered to the Corinthians (Hodge). The Greek word translated “robbed” means to “strip, plunder, spoil.” It was used of stripping a dead soldier of his armor (Plummer). Paul plundered other churches, but he preached the gospel in new areas without charge so that he could boast.

This does not mean that ministers of the gospel should not be paid. Paul specifically wrote to the Corinthians and told them that “those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14, see esp. 9:1-14). He also told them that although he had the right to take money from them when he first evangelized them, he voluntarily chose not to do so (1 Cor. 9:12).

*Paul’s Support* Paul continues, “And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what was lacking to me the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied” (11:9a). When Paul first came to Corinth to establish the church there, he needed funds. Still, he did not take money from the people whom he was evangelizing, namely, the Corinthians. He was not a “burden,” a Greek word that means “to grow numb.” He did not pressure people for money

to the point that they became numb (Tasker). In fact, he collected no money from them at all, as was his policy. Instead, the churches in Macedonia supplied his needs. The Greek word translated “supplied” means to “fill up by adding.” What they gave was added to what he earned from tent-making or to what others gave him (see Plummer; Hodge).

When Paul first came to Corinth, the churches of Macedonia supported him financially (2 Cor. 11:9). They also generously contributed to the contribution of the poor saints at Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Years later, at least one of these churches, the one at Philippi, supported Paul when he was in prison in Rome (Phil. 1:5; 4:10, 14-18).

The brethren who brought money to Paul in Corinth from Macedonia were probably Silas and Timothy, who had accompanied Paul from Asia Minor to Philippi. Timothy stayed in Philippi while Paul and Silas journeyed to Thessalonica. Evidently, Paul ended up in Athens alone, but Silas and Timothy caught up with him a short time later. He then sent them back to Macedonia and traveled to Corinth, where the two returned to Paul, this time in Corinth. They brought a contribution from Macedonia for Paul with them.

Moreover, Paul adds, **“And in everything, I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself” (11:9b)**. Not just in finances, but in every area, Paul was not a burden (a different word for burden is used here than the one used in the first part of the verse) to them (Hodge). Moreover, he did not intend to burden them in the future.

Thus, Paul solemnly affirms, **“As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia” (11:10)**. As the truth of Christ, who is the truth (Jn. 14:6), is in him, so he speaks the truth when he says that no one will prevent him from boasting that he preached without charge (Hodge).

Not receiving money from them or even telling them of his personal needs (11:9) could get him charged with not loving them. So Paul asks, **“Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!” (11:11)**. The reason was not a lack of love. Paul does not bother to give a detailed response to the suggestion that he does not love them. He exclaims, “God knows!” meaning God knows he loves them dearly (Plummer).

Why, then did he not intend to receive money from them? He goes on to explain, **“But what I do I will also continue to do that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast” (11:12)**. Paul is determined not to be a financial burden to them and boasts about it because he wanted to prevent the opportunity by his critics of saying they didn’t want the Corinthians’ money. By not accepting financial remuneration, they could not say Paul was just after their money (Hodge).

Who were Paul’s opponents? As he explains, **“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” (11:13)**. Paul now dispenses with the irony he has employed throughout the passage and speaks plainly about his rivals. They are not apostles at all! They are false apostles. Apparently, they claimed apostolic authority, and in doing so, they transformed themselves into apostles of Christ.

The Greek word translated “transforming” means “to change in fashion or appearance.” It is used of the transformation of our bodies into a body like Christ’s glorified body (Phil. 3:21). Here, the idea is simply to change one’s appearance, to disguise, to masquerade (Plummer). In this sense, the essential nature does not change, only the appearance. These false apostles appear as apostles and consequently, they are deceitful workers. Assuming the guise of apostles, they deceived the inexperienced.

**“And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (11:14)**. The use of such deception is not surprising. Satan, who heads the kingdom of darkness, disguises himself as an angel of light. If Satan practices such deception, it is no surprise that his “satellites”



do too (Tasker). Satan does not come to us as Satan; neither does sin come to us as sin. Satan is a deceiver who is disguised as a teacher (Hodge on verse 15).

Paul concludes, “Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (11:15). If Satan, the prince of darkness, can pose as an angel of light, his servants, the ministers of evil, can portray themselves as ministers of righteousness (Hodge). Their destiny will not be according to what they pretend to be, but what they are and do. God will judge the man, not the mask (Hodge).

Satan dupes by deception. Along the banks of the Amazon River in South America live species of large, colorful spiders. When one of these spiders spreads itself out, it looks like the blossom of a brilliant flower. Its appearance deceives bees and other insects. When the insects land on the spider camouflaged as a flower, the spider secretes a poison that drugs some and kills others. Such is the way Satan and his servants work. They appear to be one thing, but in the final analysis, they are another.

Paul was willing to confront such deceivers. Irenaeus wrote that Polycarp was once asked by a man he considered to be a heretic, “Do you recognize me?” Polycarp replied, “I recognize you as the firstborn of Satan.” Irenaeus adds, “So great was the figure of the apostles and their disciples less they should speak a single word of fellowship to those who adulterated the truth” (Irenaeus, cited by Tasker).

Paul was willing to do more than confront them. He did not want to allow them to be regarded as genuine apostles (11:12). Hence, he took no money from those he evangelized.

**Summary:** Because Paul cared deeply about the Corinthians and because he did not want false apostles to appear as genuine apostles, he asked the Corinthians to endure his boast that he received support from others so that he could preach the gospel to them without charge and not be a burden to them. Simply put, Paul was financially above reproach.

This passage has many lessons for us to learn. One of the major lessons has to do with Satan. In the Scripture, he is compared to a lion, a serpent, and an angel of light. Someone has said that he is to be avoided as a lion and dreaded as a serpent, but most to be feared as an angel of light. We must know the correct doctrine so false teachers do not deceive us.

The thrust of this paragraph has to do with money. In a climate where all religious leaders were suspect and in a situation where Paul himself was under suspicion, he reminded them that he was financially above reproach. He preached the gospel without charge. He did not have to do that, but he did it. The modern parallel would be that any church or Christian organization should be above reproach with their handling of finances. The money they collect should go toward the projects they claimed they were collecting them for and not to line the pockets of the preacher or leader.

Ultimately, the issue raised by this passage concerns the genuineness of Christian leaders, Christians, and Christianity. Paul fears that these believers would be deceived concerning the genuineness of Christianity itself (11:3-4). His ultimate argument is that he preached the gospel without charge, proving he was sincere, his message was genuine, and Christianity was true.

One proof of Christianity is the sacrifice of people called Christians. Think of the multiplied millions of people who sacrifice their time, energy, and money for the cause of Christ. The next time someone challenges you with the truthfulness of Christianity, remind them that while there are false teachers, you are a Christian who gives your time to serve the Lord, and you don't get paid a dime for it. Some preachers are in jail because of their lack of financial integrity, but Christianity is financially above reproach, as demonstrated by the multiplied millions that have given themselves so sacrificially in its service.

## “MY DADDY CAN BEAT UP YOUR DADDY”

Imagine two small boys playing with their toys. One is older and physically bigger than the other. After a while, they get into a conflict over a toy. The bigger boy begins to bully the smaller one, telling him that he will beat him up if he doesn't do it his way. In an effort to protect himself, the little fellow says to the bigger boy, “If you hit me, I'll go get my daddy. He is bigger than you are.” Not intimidated, the bigger boy immediately responds, “And I'll go get my daddy. My daddy can beat up your daddy.” Such boasting is childish. We expect it of children, but imagine grown men doing the same thing. Such activity would be labeled not only childish but foolish. The greater the stature of the man's maturity, the greater the foolishness.

Peter Glenn, a New York-based retailing consultant, wrote a book entitled *It's Not My Department! How to Get the Service You Want, Exactly the Way You Want It*. In it, he gives tips for getting better service, including how to get your doctor to see you on time. He suggests you “go to your doctor and say, ‘Dr. Fox, I am the customer and I hate waiting. You're always making me wait. How can we solve this? I can be your first patient of the day.... I will calculate the average amount of time you make me wait, and I will always come that many minutes late to my appointment. I will charge you for my waiting time.’ If that doesn't work, tell the doctor that you're going to change doctors and ask him how much he values your business. He may tell you that he has a waiting list that is a mile long. Then you must decide if it's important enough to change doctors.” Glenn also advises you on how to get a refund. He says, “When you go to a store to get a refund, or when you have to call an insurance company because you think your bills are all wrong, prepare for battle.... Arm yourself with correspondence, receipts, and even tape recordings if you've got them. If you prepare as if you're going to defend your life to a jury, with facts, passion, and determination, you might cut your waiting time in half. Let them know the faster and more efficiently they do it, the sooner it will be over.”

Finally, Glenn counsels people wanting to get instant service. He advises, “Just go into the store, and when you find that you can't get help, just stand there and scream the word “Help” as loudly as you can. You will see people who haven't moved in years come running. Screaming, “Help! at the top of your lungs ... confronts the situation, calls a halt to routine and starts alarms ringing everywhere. You get attention suddenly and completely.... They will sing to you, if that's what you want, or anything else you want, as long as you don't do that again” (Beth Ann Krier, “You Say You Want Service,” *Los Angeles*, 5/5/1990, p. E-1).

Some adult bragging is as childish as screaming help in a department store. Yet that is just what the apostle Paul did. What did he brag about? Why did he do it? What can we learn from it?

### Paul Foolishly Boasted

*Paul's Boast* Having boasted about preaching the gospel without charge (11:1-15), Paul says, “I say again. let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little” (11:16). Earlier, Paul asked them to bear with him in a little folly of boasting (11:1). Now again, he asks that they not consider him a fool as he brags. If they do, he requests that they listen to him while he also boasts a little more. The word “also” indicates that his opponents were boasting. They started it (Plummer). The Corinthians listened to them (11:4). So Paul now indulges again in the folly of boasting (11:18).

This kind of boasting is not something the Lord would do. **“What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting” (11:17).** The phrase “according to the Lord” means “according to the standard of the Lord.” This boast is not characteristic of the Lord or one of His servants (Hodge). Christ was the example of humility, not boasting (Phil. 2:5 ff.). In his heart, Paul’s motives were right, but the words he spoke were not like the Lord. They were foolishness.

*Paul’s Critics* If boasting is not like the Lord, but foolishness, why do it? Paul explains, **“Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast” (11:18).** Paul’s critics, the false apostles (11:13), were boasting according to the flesh, that is, their boasting was not according to the Lord (11:17), but according to what man apart from God accomplishes. In this case, “according to the flesh” includes what is external (11:22; Tasker). Since “many,” namely, Paul’s opponents at Corinth, were boasting and the Corinthians were listening (11:4), Paul feels compelled to engage in this folly for their sakes.

So what if Paul’s critics boast? Why should he do what they are doing? He explains, **“For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!” (11:19).** With irony, Paul says they were wise (Hodge); they gladly bear with the foolish boasting of his critics. In other words, Paul is going to indulge in what his critics are doing because the Corinthians were listening to them.

They not only listened, but they also tolerated the worst kind of folly. Paul explains the kind of fools they bear: **“For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face” (11:20).** They were willing to bear with people enslaving them (to their system of thought, or to themselves), consuming them, taking advantage of them, lording it over them, and insulting them. Three of these five phrases describe authoritarianism (see Kruse). The false apostles exalted themselves over the Corinthians to enslave them and, perhaps, even literally strike them, although most commentators say this is symbolic of “humiliating treatment” (see Tasker). The other two phrases, “devours and takes from you,” refer to money (Mk. 12:40; 1 Cor. 12:16). These false apostles fleece the flock at Corinth.

Paul adds, **“To our shame, I say that we were too weak for that!” (11:21a).** Paul’s critics had accused him of being weak (10:10). Now he sarcastically says, I am ashamed to admit that I am too weak to lord over you like they have done (Kruse calls it “scathing sarcasm”).

**“But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also” (11:21b).** He may be “weak” (11:20), but he will be “bold” as anyone else even though he concedes again that it is foolish for him to say so.

Peter Glenn, a retail consultant, actually stood in the middle of a department store, repeatedly yelling, “Help!” A clerk rushed over. “I just did not know how long we could stand here without getting your attention,” Glenn explained indignantly. “Well, I was writing something. It would have been a few minutes,” replied the clerk. “But if you are writing, how can you sell?” Glenn demanded. “Because I’m doing both,” said the clerk, anger seeping into his voice. “If I saw somebody who needed help, I’d give them help. I didn’t know you needed help.” “That’s why I screamed ‘Help!’ Okay?” Glenn told him. “Okay,” said the salesman, “no problem.” Glenn walked away, mocking the clerk, “No problem,” then he added, “It’s a big problem.... He’s completely enraged, offended, and he sold nothing.”

What would make a grown man, a retail consultant for twenty-five years making \$5,000 a day, scream “help!” in the middle of a department store? Glenn explained to a newspaper reporter, “We live in a ‘service economy,’ but there is no service. Servers don’t serve and customers put up with it. They don’t expect service and they don’t get service.” He described other factors, such as clerks who are not well paid or do not work on commission and managers

who tolerate bad service. But the fact remains “customers put up with it,” therefore, Glenn did something that would strike us all as foolish (Beth Ann Krier, “You Say You Want Service,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 5, 1990, p. E-5).

Like an adult screaming “help!” in a department store, the apostle Paul engaged in foolish boasting because the Corinthians put up with the boasting and bragging of false teachers.

## Paul Would Rather Boast about His Weakness

*His Nationally* Paul now boldly (11:21), although in his opinion foolishly (11:21), boasts (11:16). He begins with his nationality asking, “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.” (11:22). Paul’s adversaries were Jewish and apparently glorified in their ancestry. Paul boasted that he, too, is just as Jewish as they are. The precise distinction between Hebrew, Israelite, and seed of Abraham is difficult to determine (Kruse). Hebrew probably refers to a Jew who spoke the Hebrew language (Acts 6:1; Plummer; Tasker).

Paul is combating false apostles (11:13) who were trying to deceive the Corinthians (11:3, 13). They were boasting about their ancestry (see “also” in 11:16). Ordinarily, the apostle Paul would never do such a thing. In fact, later in his life, he talked about being “of the stock of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5) and counted it all as a bunch of rubbish (Phil. 3:8). However, to protect the believers in Corinth, he was willing to engage in what he considered the foolish practice of boasting.

I have a graduate degree in theology with a major in Bible exposition. My course required four years of Greek and three years of Hebrew. I would not normally even mention that, much less brag about it. On a few isolated occasions over the years, I have used it when dealing with a believer who a cultist was influencing. I’ve reminded them I know as much, if not more, Greek than the people trying to influence them.

For example, Jehovah’s Witnesses will tell you there is no article in John 1:1. They want to render that verse “and the word was *a* god,” but anyone who knows Greek knows that that verse should be translated “the Word was deity.” I’ve repeatedly reminded people that I’ve studied Greek for four years and am well aware of what that phrase means in the Greek text. In a sense, that is bragging, and it is foolish for me to do it, but to protect a believer, I have done it and will do it again. That is precisely what Paul is doing in this passage.

*His Service* Next, Paul boasts about his service, saying, “Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more” (11:23a). Paul’s opponents were not servants of Christ. They were “false apostles” (11:13), “ministers of Satan” (11:15), but for the sake of argument, he assumes they are what they are claiming (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker). Again, reminding them that this is foolish boasting, he claims that he has been more of a minister of Christ than they are. In the Greek text, the expression “I speak as a fool” is stronger than “I speak foolishly” in verse 21. This kind of boasting, comparing one service to another, is madness (Plummer). Paul warned the Corinthians not to do it (1 Cor. 1:11-16; 3:4-9, 21-22; 4:1).

The specifics of Paul’s service are now delineated (11:23-33). This long list can be divided into his physical sufferings (11:23-25), his travels (11:26), his toils (11:27), his deep concerns (11:28), and his weakness (11:29-30). Some of these are recorded in Acts, and some are not.

1. Sufferings. “In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often” (11:23b). Paul says he labored more than those false apostles. He also says he was beaten excessively (6:5; Tasker) and was frequently imprisoned. Before the

writing of 2 Corinthians, we only know of one imprisonment, namely, the one at Philippi, although tradition says he was imprisoned at Ephesus. After writing 2 Corinthians, Paul was imprisoned four other times, in Jerusalem, in Caesarea, and twice in Rome, making a total of five (Plummer). Clement of Rome, who wrote in AD 95, said Paul was jailed seven times (Tasker). He faced death often (1:9).

Specific examples of the general statement concerning physical suffering are given (Tasker). “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times; I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep” (11:24-25). Paul had experienced judicial floggings in the synagogue from the Jews five times. None of these are recorded in Acts. The Mosaic Law limited punishment by beating to forty stripes (Deut. 25:1-3). Less that law be violated by an error, the Jews restricted the number of stripes to 39 (Plummer). He was also beaten with a rod three times. The stripes were “from the Jews.” Thus, the beatings were probably from the Gentiles (Plummer). Only one such incident is recorded in Acts (Acts 16:22-23), which was illegal because Paul was a Roman citizen.

The reference to stoning is probably the reaction of an angry mob rather than a Jewish execution (see Kruse). Such an incident is recorded once in Acts (Acts 14:19).

Before writing this letter, Paul says he was shipwrecked three times. In Acts, the only shipwreck reported is the one that occurred three years after this letter’s writing (Acts 27:39 ff.), although Acts records nine voyages before this time (Kruse). No doubt, the night and day spent in the deep was during one of those shipwrecks. “Night and day” means 24 hours (Hodge).

Few of us have undergone such physical suffering for the cause of Christ. We complain because we must get out of bed on Sunday morning to go to church or give up a few leisure hours to serve the Lord. Many through the centuries have suffered extreme hardship in the service of Christ.

2. Travels. “In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (11:26). Paul traveled often. His frequent travels were not for pleasure or profit (Plummer). What follows are dangers he encountered as he traveled (Kruse). Paul listed eight such dangers he encountered while traveling. Several are in contrasting pairs.

Paul experienced the dangers of crossing rivers and traveling on land. The Greek word translated “waters” means “rivers,” as distinguished from the sea (Hodge). There were few bridges or ferries in Paul’s day (Plummer). Thus, crossing rivers, especially those subject to sudden flooding, was dangerous (Tasker). Robbers made traveling by land perilous. The danger from robbers is illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Tasker).

In his frequent travels, Paul was exposed to dangers from both Jews and Gentiles. From the Jews at first, because he began by preaching in the synagogue, but also from the Greeks. For example, he experienced opposition from the Jews at Corinth (Acts 18:12) and from the Gentiles at Ephesus (Acts 19:23 ff.).

Everywhere Paul went, he faced dangers, not only from rivers and robberies, but in cities like Damascus, Jerusalem, Iconium, and Lystra, to name a few, and in the countryside, where he met with wild beasts and fierce storms (Tasker).

Furthermore, there were dangers when he was sailing the seas, lesser perils than shipwrecks (Hodge). On top of that, he and his work were in constant danger from false brethren, probably a reference to Judaizers claiming to be Christians (Plummer) and, no doubt, an illusion to the false apostles at Corinth (11:13; Kruse).

Anyone who travels today is aware of the dangers of travel. Fifty thousand people a year are killed in automobile accidents. While not as many are killed in airplane crashes, nonetheless, people die in mid-air collisions and even in accidents on the runway. Anyone who travels even in our day in the service of Christ faces constant danger.

3. Toils. **“In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (11:27).** The Greek word translated “weariness” means labor to the point of fatigue and the one tendered “toil” means painful effort, words that suggest manual labor (Tasker). Paul exerted himself to the point of fatigue in ministry and, no doubt, in his trade to support his ministry (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8). He often missed sleep from preaching (Acts 27:12-31), praying, or practicing his trade (Plummer). He also involuntarily went without food and drink (Plummer; Kruse) and frequently voluntarily went without meals for ministry’s sake (Hodge). Sometimes, he was cold from lack of adequate clothing (Kruse). Paul experienced many personal deprivations in his ministry (1 Cor. 4:11 ff.; 2 Cor. 6:10).

One author sums it up well when he said, “The greatest of the apostles here appears before us, his back lacerated by frequent scourgings, his body worn by hunger, thirst, and exposure; cold and naked; persecuted by Jews and Gentiles driven from place to place without certain dwelling” (Hodge).

4. Deep concern. **“Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (11:28).** Besides the external circumstances (11:27), there was an internal concern (11:28). He experienced outward affliction and inward anxiety. This was not undue anxiety concerning himself (Mt. 6:25-34) but legitimate concern for others (Lk. 13:34). He was deeply concerned daily for all the churches he founded and ministered in.

The Greek word translated “what comes” continues a vivid picture of this pressure upon Paul. It means “gathering, a riotous throng.” The picture is of a “tumult, a hostile crowd” (Acts 24:12). Paul’s daily concourse was a crowd of people demanding his attention (Hodge).

An example of Paul’s daily deep concern is the weaker brother, **“Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” (11:29).** To the weaker brother, Paul became weak not just in his external conformity (1 Cor. 9:22), but in his internal identification. Because of his intense compassion and sympathy, Paul felt for and with the weaker brother (Plummer). When a weaker brother stumbled, Paul was not indifferent. He was indignant! The Greek word translated “burn with indignation” means “to set on fire, burn.” It was a metaphor for grief or indignation. The statement about whom Paul feels the fire is not clear. It merely says, “I am set on fire; I burn up.” This could describe the grief he feels for the fallen (MacDonald; Lowery; Clarke), the indignation he feels toward the one who made him fall (Kruse), or both! (Plummer; Hodge; Kruse; Hughes).

Paul’s opponents in Corinth were bragging that they were the true ministers of Christ (11:23). They pointed to their ancestry (11:22) and perhaps their service (11:23-29). Paul’s point is that he is as much a Jew as they are and has gone through more in the service of Christ than they have. He admits that such statements are foolishness (11:23), but he does it because he is concerned about them (11:2).

A young marine was huddled in a foxhole with bullets flying overhead and shells bursting around him. He had received no mail for weeks, so he was delighted to be handed a letter even in that situation. Quickly, he ripped open the envelope and read the message from a business establishment in his hometown. The letter read, “Your account is overdue. If the balance of \$25.00 is not paid within seven days, you will be in serious trouble.” In comparing himself with his opponents, Paul is saying the trouble they’ve gone through for their supposed service of Christ is like getting a dun for \$25.00 compared to his foxhole experience.

*His Weakness* Paul began this chapter asking the Corinthians to bear with him in his folly (11:1), that is, his boasting (11:10). He boasted about the preaching of the gospel without charge (11:7-15; esp. see 7). He continued his foolish boasting (11:16), bragging about his nationality (11:22) and his service (11:23-29). Having concluded his boasting about his service, he says, “If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity” (11:30). He has repeatedly expressed his distaste for boasting (11:1, 16-18, 21, 23). Yet, he did it because the false apostles did it (11:18) and the Corinthians were listening to them (11:4). Now, he adds that if I must boast, I will boast in my weakness. The false apostles bragged about their ancestors (11:22) and their service (11:23 ff.). They compared themselves with each other (11:12). Paul says he would rather brag about his futility, weakness, and suffering (Hodge).

Boast in weakness? Is he speaking the truth? He insists that he is. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying” (11:31). He had been accused of saying one thing and meaning another (1:17; Plummer). So, in the most solemn terms, he assures them that he is telling the truth (Hodge). God knows he is! The eternal, blessed God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ knows Paul has told the truth in saying he would rather glory in his weakness (11:30) and in relating what he is about to say (11:32).

Here is an illustration of Paul’s weakness, “In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to apprehend me but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands” (11:32-33). Paul went to Damascus “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). On the way, he met the Lord (Acts 9:3-6) and, as a result, began to preach that Jesus Christ was the Son of God (Acts 9:20). Luke says the Jews plotted to kill him and they watched the gates of the city day and night to do so (Acts 9:23-24). The disciples let him down the wall around the city through a basket, and Paul escaped (Acts 9:25). Thus, Saul became Paul, a Greek word that means “little.” He began high-minded, arrogant, and proud. He humbly left the city in a basket by night (Kruse). In 2 Corinthians 11, he glories in his weakness.

Though the account in Acts and the coverage in Corinth differ, the two records are compatible. Luke says the Jews plotted to kill him and waited at the gate. Paul says the governor was guarding the city with a garrison to apprehend him. It is not unreasonable to assume that, as in other cases, including the crucifixion of Christ, the Jews persuaded the governor to arrest Paul (Kruse).

Another “problem” with Paul’s account is that he calls “Aretas” a king who appointed a governor over Damascus. Aretas IV, 9 BC-AD 39, was king of Nabatea, a kingdom whose capital was Petra. Nabatea once included Damascus but was incorporated into the Roman province of Syria. How could Aretas appoint a governor over Damascus? The answer is that the Roman emperor, Caligula (AD 37-41), gave Aretas control over Damascus and, therefore, he would have been the one to appoint its governor (Hughes).

Paul was willing to boast in not taking money from them when he first preached to them (11:7), as well as concerning his ancestry (11:22) and his service (11:23-29), but he would rather boast concerning his infirmities. He does not explain why in this paragraph, but he does later (12:9).

**Summary:** Although it was foolish, Paul boasted about his ancestry and service because his critics did so and the Corinthians listened to them, but he would rather boast about his weakness.

This passage vividly demonstrates that Paul sacrificially served the Lord, even to the point of looking foolish.

## MY BOAST AND MY PLEASURE

We do not like to think of ourselves as braggers, but we all boast about something. What do you brag about when you boast? Young men often boast about their physical feats. They flex their biceps or expand their chests to show they are in great physical shape. Older men can't do that. Their chests have fallen, and their biceps don't rise very high when they are flexed. So they adopt a ball team and brag that their team is the best team; their team won the championship.

Let me ask a strange question. What would you brag about spiritually? Bragging and boasting about spiritual accomplishments are more common than we think among Christians. Some devout believers brag about their superior doctrinal position compared to other denominations. Faithful believers have boasted of their uninterrupted church or Sunday school attendance for many years. Some pastors and preachers boast about the large amount of Scripture they have committed to memory.

Is there a legitimate spiritual boast? In 2 Corinthians, Paul discusses foolish boasting in two chapters (2 Cor. 10 and 11). Then, he mentions what he considers to be his legitimate boast. Actually, what he talks about should be the legitimate boast of every believer.

### Paul would Rather Boast in His Weakness

*Paul's Revelation* Admitting it is not wise to boast (10:12; 11:1, 16), Paul has bragged about not receiving remuneration for preaching the gospel (11:7), about his ancestry (11:22), and about his service (11:23-29). He has also stated that he would rather boast in his weakness (11:30). In 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, he mentions one more area of boasting (12:1-5) and explains why he would rather boast in his weakness (12:6-10).

The other area of boasting is revelations. "It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord" (12:1). Again, Paul emphasizes that it is not expedient or profitable to boast and brag. Nevertheless, as he has explained (11:4, 18), it is necessary in this situation. So he introduces the subject of visions and revelations, that is, direct revelation from God, given to him *by* the Lord (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker).

One case in point is related: "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven" (12:2). It becomes apparent later in the passage that Paul is speaking about himself (12:5-7), but he modestly presents this experience in the third person as "a man in Christ," that is, simply as a believer (Hodge). Fourteen years before his writing 2 Corinthians, Paul was caught up to the third heaven. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in AD 57. Fourteen years before, it would have been AD 43 when he was in Antioch (Acts 11:26; Hughes says Paul was at Antioch when this happened in AD 44). Anything said about this experience beyond that is conjecture (Hughes). Paul did not know if he had this experience by leaving his body or in his body, which at least indicates that he thought bodily transportation to heaven was possible. What he knew was that he had been transported to the third heaven.

From a biblical point of view, there are three heavens: the atmosphere where the birds fly, the stratosphere, where the stars are, and the third where God dwells. Paul was ushered into the very presence of God.



He continues, “And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (12:3-4). The repetition of the statement in verse 2 is for emphasis (Hodge says it is a repetition of verse 2; Plummer says “and” indicates two revelations or one revelation in two stages). Paul did not know whether he was in his body and went to heaven, called paradise in verse 3 (Hodge; Tasker), or whether he was out of it; God knew which way it was. What he did remember was that he heard (not saw) and he was aware that the words he heard were unutterable, that is, he was not allowed to repeat them (Hodge).

Paul’s experience was unique even for men in the Bible. God came down and met Moses on Sinai. Moses and Elijah came down from heaven to meet Christ, Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. John saw visions of the heavenly throne, but only Paul is said to have been transported there either in or out of his body.

Even though Paul’s experience was unique, some have claimed to have had the same experience since his time. Several years ago, I read an advertisement about Dr. Percy Collett, a medical doctor who claimed to have ministered in the Amazon River Basin of South America for over fifty years. The article read, “Having spent his life teaching the heathen and doctoring their sickness ‘without once charging them a dime for a prescription’ a few years back, he began to pray, ‘Lord, if I found favor in your sight, show me Your glory.’ In 1982, a small group, including Dr. Collett and a young medical doctor, was in a period of ‘fasting and intercession’ when an angel of the Lord came to him and transported his ‘soul’ body to heaven. For 5½ earth days, he walked with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Elijah, Elisha, Abraham, Moses, Paul, and others. He viewed the mansions of the saints and toured the buildings NOW under construction.” The article said that Dr. Collett had shared what he saw and heard at services in the civic center in Montgomery, Alabama, on August 22, 1984. For a donation of \$10.00, the ad promised to send an 8-page report of the services and the interview with Dr. Collett. For \$12.00, one could receive the entire service on audio cassette, and a video cassette could be obtained for a contribution of \$100.00.

People have claimed to have duplicated many of the miracles in the Bible, such as healing the sick and even going to heaven. Why don’t they duplicate something like the parting of the Red Sea or walking on water while others are watching? I seriously doubt modern claims of such miraculous feats. I have no doubt Paul’s experience was genuine.

*Paul’s Boast* Paul could not reveal what he heard, but he could boast in the experience. Concerning boasting about revelations, he said, “Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities” (12:5). Speaking as if there are two Pauls (Plummer), Paul could and Paul would boast of the Paul who was transported to heaven, but he would rather boast about his weakness (11:30).

He explains, “For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I forbear, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me” (12:6). If Paul did boast about his experience of heaven, he would not be a fool because he would be telling the truth (Plummer), but he would rather not talk about it because he did not want people to think any more of him than what they saw or heard (Hodge). In other words, Paul did not want people to have an excessive evaluation of him because of some exceptional past experience, but that what they thought of him was based on his present conduct, ministry, and weakness (12:6).

The estimate of some of Paul’s personal presence was that he was weak and his speech left something to be desired. He wants them to have that impression because it is the truth. He is weak.

There are things about which a believer can legitimately boast. In Paul's case, it would have been perfectly proper for him to boast about his revelations. In this extended discussion thus far, Paul has bragged that he preached the gospel without charge, had a great spiritual heritage, and served above all others. In a sense, that is a legitimate boast, yet Paul calls such bragging foolishness (11:1, 16; 12:6). There was something about which he delighted to boast, namely, his infirmities (12:5).

## Paul even took Pleasure in his Weakness

Why would anyone want to boast in weakness? Paul did (11:30; 12:5) and swore he was telling the truth (11:31). In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, he explains why he would rather boast in his weakness. He learned this lesson the hard way.

*Paul's Painful Experience* "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure" (12:7). To prevent Paul from pride because of the revelations he just described and others like them, he was given a thorn in the flesh. What was Paul's thorn in the flesh? The Greek word translated "thorn" means "stake, thorn, splinter" or "anything pointed." "Flesh," of course, can either refer to the body or the sinful nature. There are three basic interpretations of the phrase "thorn in the flesh." If "flesh" is a reference to the body, the thorn in the flesh is a physical ailment or illness (Hodge), such as an earache or a headache (Tertullian), eye trouble, epilepsy, a reoccurring fever (Ramsay), etc. If "flesh" is the fallen nature, the thorn is a temptation (Tasker). This view has been popular among Roman Catholic writers, especially during medieval times. Calvin viewed this interpretation as ridiculous (Hughes). If the thorn in the flesh is simply a figure of speech, it refers to persecution or opposition of some kind (Plummer). Most modern commentators interpret the thorn in the flesh as a physical ailment (Kruse). Many claim that the ailment was eye trouble and quote Galatians 4:15 as support, which is not a bad "guess."

Paul's thorn is called a messenger of Satan to buffet him. God permitted Satan to afflict Paul like He afflicted Job (Job 1-2). Again, Satan's "bad" action is used for God's "good" purpose. God allows Satan to buffet Paul to prevent pride. The word "buffet" means "to strike with the fist" (Mt. 26:67). Paul's thorn was a painful, humiliating experience.

*Paul's Prayer* "Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me" (12:8). Paul asked God to remove the thorn. The Greek word rendered "plead" means to "beseech, exhort." It is used frequently in the New Testament, but not of prayer to God. Paul uses the word to exhort believers to action as earnestly as he exhorted believers to obedience. Paul pleaded with the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh. Paul's experience paralleled the Lord's (Tasker). As the Lord prayed three times in Gethsemane, so did Paul. In both cases, the request to remove the problem was not granted. God's greater purpose was accomplished.

*God's Answer* God answered Paul, but not as he had hoped, "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness'" (12:9a). God did not remove the thorn, but He did supply grace, enabling Paul to cope with the thorn. God explained that His strength was most fully expressed in human weakness (see Plummer; Hodge). The Greek word rendered "weakness" means "without strength." When believers are without strength, God grants them ("grace"), that is, His power as they look to Him.

In Paul's case, God's greater purpose was to teach Paul that His grace and His strength were sufficient. Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, "Christ's grace is sufficient to make your trouble

useful to you, to enable you to triumph over it, and to bring you out of 10,000 like it.” Dean Paget put it like this, “For those who patiently and humbly rest upon God’s grace, no aim is too high, no task too great, no sin too strong, and no trial too hard.” God’s grace is indeed sufficient.

*Paul’s Response* Paul draws two conclusions. First, “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ will rest upon me” (12:9b). Rather than pray for the thorn to be removed, Paul concluded that he would gladly boast in his weakness, knowing that God’s power is most manifested in his lack of strength. The Greek word translated “rest” comes from a word that means “to tabernacle.” Perhaps Paul chose this word to suggest that the power of God descended upon him and took up residence as the Shechinah (God’s glory) descended on the Tabernacle in the Old Testament (Plummer). In this epistle, Paul called his body a tent (5:1).

Paul’s second conclusion is, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10). Paul not only would gladly glory (12:9), he would “take pleasure” in weakness and other difficulties as well. The verb “take pleasure” means “to give consent,” “to think good,” even “to be well pleased.” To boast is one thing. To think it to be good and be pleased is something else.

The immediate context has dealt with weakness (beginning with 11:30; 12:5), but Paul expands this to other areas such as reproaches, that is, injuries, needs (11:27), persecutions (11:23-25), and distress, a Greek word which means “narrowness of space” and used figuratively for difficulty. Paul experienced all of these for Christ’s sake and was pleased to do so because as he was weak, he was strong due to God’s power upon him.

Paul’s legitimate brag was that he was weak! It was not only his boast; he took pleasure in weakness because when he was weak, he was strong by God’s grace and power. That sounds like a perversion to us. We glory in strength, not weakness, but the spiritually mature person glories in weakness, not strength.

In his book, *The Road Less Traveled*, Scott Peck says, “Problems are the cutting edge that distinguishes between success and failure. Problems call forth our courage and our wisdom; indeed, they create our courage and wisdom. It is only because of problems that we grow mentally and spiritually. When we desire to encourage the growth of the human spirit, we challenge and encourage the human capacity to solve problems. Just as in school, we deliberately set problems for our children to solve. It is through the pain of confronting and solving problems that we learn. As Benjamin Franklin said, ‘Those things that hurt, instruct.’ It is for this reason that wise people learn not to dread but actually to welcome problems and to actually welcome the pain of problems” (Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*).

**Summary:** Even though Paul could have boasted in Revelations, he would rather boast and even take pleasure in weakness because it is then, by God’s grace and power, he was strong.

This passage contains a life-changing truth. The natural human tendency is to boast in strength, deny or conceal weakness, and complain about infirmities. We think the spiritual reaction is to not boast about our strength and not complain about our infirmities. If that’s all there were to the spiritual response, spirituality would be like becoming a stoic. Indeed, the true biblical response to life is actually to glory in weaknesses, not because there is glory in weakness itself, but because it is an opportunity to see God work.

When I was in seminary, I met a man named Bob Lightner. After graduation, Bob eventually became a professor at the seminary. One weekend, he went to preach in West Texas. As I recall, he had to go from one small Texas town to another, and a man in one of the churches offered to fly him on a small plane. The plane crashed. One man was killed and Bob was severely injured.

He had a compound skull fracture, his right eye was blown out, his nose was broken and slashed, and his upper lip was cut all the way through. There was a broken jaw, multiple broken facial bones, a crushed right wrist, a dislocated thumb, cuts and bruises on his arms and body, plus potential hazards from all of his injuries. The week that he was in the hospital in Amarillo, Texas, I was conducting a meeting in the Amarillo Bible Church and was able to visit him several times. By the end of that week, he was well enough to fly back home to a hospital in Dallas. In the providence of God, he, his wife, and I were on the same flight from Amarillo to Dallas.

I was not living in Dallas then, but I had made arrangements to spend the night there. A friend of mine was scheduled to pick me up. Bob had arranged for someone to pick him up, but when we arrived at the airport, Bob's friend did not show up; mine did. So my friend offered to take Bob and his wife to the hospital.

We put Bob in a wheelchair and our mutual friend, the one that had come to pick me up, pushed him down the corridor of Love Field in Dallas, Texas. Bob began to talk about his problems, and they became legion. He not only had multiple physical injuries, but he also had financial problems as well, for at the time, he was not sure that the insurance company would pay any of his hospital bills.

We placed Bob in the car and slowly started moving across town toward the hospital. Bob was still talking. He gave us details about all the difficulties he was about to face, and at that point, our friend, Haddon Robinson, said, "Well, Bob, praise God." I immediately thought how cruel a person could be, but Haddon continued, "Bob, praise God, what an opportunity to see God work."

That was the attitude of the apostle Paul. He gloried in his weakness because it was then he knew he could see God's power in his life.

## HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO?

Service is a universally recognized virtue. Although some politicians have disgraced the office, we as a society commend those who serve our country by working in the government. Many men have worked in government service for less money than they could have made doing the same job in the private sector. Large corporations often emphasize service not as a “trick” to get more business but as a way of life. Businessmen in smaller companies often join “service” clubs like the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis Club, and the Lions Club. All these clubs’ purpose is to serve in one way or another.

Biblical Christianity puts a premium on service. “Religion” often degenerates into rule-keeping, but biblical Christianity emphasizes simple service. Paul wrote Galatians to teach that Christ had made us free from the Mosaic Law (Gal. 5:1). Having established that point, he adds, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Perhaps a legitimate question is how far we should go in our service. Would you give an hour a week to serve others? Would you give me an evening a week? Would you serve without being paid? Would you serve without being appreciated? Would you do something you consider foolish in an attempt to serve other people?

In 2 Corinthians, Paul discusses the ministry in general and his ministry in particular. He reveals how far he was willing to go and to the extent that he was not willing to serve others. His life is an example of what our lives ought to be.

### His Past Action

*Paul’s Boasting* Having completed his boasting (11:1-12:10), Paul comments on it: “I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me” (12:11a). When he began boasting, he acknowledged it was folly (11:1, 16). Reflecting on what he had done, he confesses, “Sure enough I became a fool,” he quickly adds he was forced into it by what they did (Plummer; Hodge). The backdrop of all of this was the presence of false apostles at Corinth (11:13). The Corinthians were listening to them (11:4) and being taken in by them (11:20).

*Paul’s Explanation* He explains, “For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing” (12:11b). The Greek verb rendered “ought” means to “owe, be a debtor.” They were obligated to recommend him because he was not in any way inferior to the most eminent apostles. Although some commentators take this reference to the false apostles of 11:13 (Plummer; Hughes), this is a reference to the twelve (Hodge).

Why should they not commend him? There was ample, indeed, abundant proof that Paul was inferior to no one as an apostle. “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (12:12). When Paul established the church in Corinth, he performed the signs of an apostle, namely, “signs, wonders, and mighty deeds,” a reference to either a variety of miracles (Plummer) or miracles viewed three different ways (Hodge; Tasker). If the latter, miracles are signs in that they are pointing to something. In this case, they confirm the divine messenger and his message (Acts 2:22; Mk. 16:20). Miracles

are wonders in the effect that they produce upon people and mighty deeds in the sense that they are manifestations of God's power (Hodge).

Paul not only worked miracles that authenticated his apostleship, he did them with "all perseverance" (Greek: "in all endurance). He endured hardship, opposition, and persecution (11:23-27; Hodge). When he adds, "though I am nothing," he means he is nothing in and of himself. Jesus said, "Without Me, you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). Paul testified, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Speaking of service, Paul once said, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16). His answer to his question was, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5). Paul was what he was by God's grace (1 Cor. 15:10). He was nothing in and of himself. By God's grace, he was an apostle.

One other thing needs to be explained. "For what is it in which you are inferior to other churches except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!" (12:13). Paul was not inferior as an apostle and the Corinthians were not inferior as an apostolic church! There was one possible exception. The only way the Corinthians might have been second-rate was in Paul's unwillingness to receive financial support from them and thus be a burden to them (Hodge). The implication is that others did receive such support. Paul sarcastically asks their forgiveness for not taking their money! (Plummer calls it irony; Hodge and Tasker say this, not sarcasm).

His critics may have claimed that one of the signs of the apostles was receiving money for labor. The fact that he didn't, they might have charged, indicated that he was less than an apostle (11:7-9; Plummer). When the enemy cannot find something legitimate to criticize, he will twist a legitimate item to make it sound illegitimate. Paul legitimately did not take money from them for his ministry. Perhaps that was made to sound somehow wrong.

Verses 11-13 indicate that the Corinthians should have defended him but didn't (see esp. 12:11).

There have been so many scandals in our generation that we are afraid to defend anyone anymore. Politicians have been jailed for breaking the law. A man running for president dropped out of the race in disgrace. Facing a possible impeachment trial, a president resigned from his office. Athletes have had to return their trophies when it was discovered they used drugs. A prominent athlete has been barred from ever participating in the game again because of gambling. Musicians have had to return their trophies because it was not their voice on the record. Even preachers are in jail for wrongdoing. In such a climate, who would want to commend or defend anybody? Yet Paul says they should have congratulated him. There are still honorable men serving others

Verses 11-13 also indicate that Paul was willing to become a fool in his service for Christ (esp. 12:11). Are you willing to go that far in serving others?

## His Future Actions

*Paul's Plan* "Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you" (12:14). This statement can mean either that for the third time Paul was *ready* to come but *was not able* to make one of those trips (Barnes; Clarke; A. T. Robertson; Hughes, who does not accept this view, cites four others who do including Beza), or that for the third time, *as in the other two*, he was ready and would come (Alford; Plummer; Hodge; Hughes; Tasker; Kruse). Because he intended to come once and did not (1:15-16, 23; 2:1-4), this

statement must mean that he was ready to come on two other occasions but did not come on one. If he had actually come twice, he would have been ready to come four times, not three (that is, once to establish the church, once when he failed to come mentioned in 2 Corinthians 1:15-16, a second visit, and now the upcoming visit).

*Paul's Reasons* Paul had not received financial support from them in the past (12:13) and he will not do so when he comes again. He gives two reasons for not doing so.

First, "For I do not seek yours, but you" (12:14a). Paul did not want their money or possessions; he wanted to minister to them spiritually.

Second, "For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children" (12:14b). In a family, the father provides for the small children, not the reverse. Paul was their spiritual father (1 Cor. 4:14-15), and he would not take from them but give to them. In 1990, according to *Money Magazine*, it cost \$265, 249.00 to rear a child to age 22, including college. That figure does not include extras such as music lessons, summer camp, daycare, Karate, ballet, cars/insurance, etc. If it did, the price would be from one-half to one million dollars (*Money Magazine*, July 1990). It costs to rear a child. It cost Paul to minister, yet, as a good father, he did it without pay.

Moreover, he adds, "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved" (12:15). Paul would cheerfully not only give his money but his himself for them. The Greek word translated "spend" refers to spending money (Mk. 5:26; Lk. 15:14; etc.), whereas the verb rendered "be spent" means "to spend ourselves wholly." The idea is "to be exhausted." For their spiritual lives, Paul would gladly spend his resources, time, effort, and energy (Phil. 2:17). Paul was willing to give himself and his resources even if he would be loved less for it. He seems to get less love the more he loves them.

*Paul's Past Practice* Paul says, "But be that as it may, I did not burden you" (12:16a). Even though they did not appreciate it, he did not take financial support from them.

Paul adds, "Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile!" (12:16b). The Greek word rendered "guile" means "to bait, deceit." It was used of baiting fish. If Paul is saying he trapped them for selfish reasons, the idea is that by not taking money, he deceived them, but it was for their benefit. His "deception" did them no harm; it helped them, like the doctor giving a patient a placebo.

M. R. DeHaan tells of a demonstrative woman at a religious meeting who became so enthralled by the speaker's oratory that she jumped upon a bench shouting, "Amen!" Her standing up, however, obstructed the view of other listeners, and her constant cries of affirmation disturbed the speaker. Finally, a reverent older gentleman arose and said gravely, "I think if the lady knew she had a large hole in each of her stockings, she would sit down." She sat down! "Oh brother," said a young preacher, "how could you tell a lie like that?" The old man's answer was, "How could she put the stocking on unless there was a large hole in the top?"

If this statement is a charge against him by his opponents (Hodge; Tasker; Kruse; Hughes), Paul is saying, "Granted, I did not burden you with the need to support me financially, but someone will say 'Yes, but he refused money the first time so you would trust him and he would trick you the next time as in the collection for the saints in Jerusalem.'" Either interpretation leads to the same conclusion, namely, that Paul did not use deception to harm them (4:2). He was a man of integrity.

Paul responds with a series of questions, "Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?" (12:17-18). Paul had sent Titus to Corinth (8:16-17) to begin the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (8:6). Paul now asks

four questions. The first two expect a negative answer and the last two a positive answer. The Greek word translated “take advantage” means “to defraud.” Did Paul or Titus and the brethren who accompanied them defraud them? No. Did they have the same spirit, attitude and steps, that is, actions, as Paul? Yes. Well, Paul did not trick them or trap them, did he?

Earlier, Paul declared that he was “not walking in craftiness” (4:2). But he also pointed out that Satan “by his craftiness” deceived Eve” (11:3) and that the false apostles were like Satan (11:13-14). Thus, Paul was not practicing craftiness; they were and they were accusing him of doing it. Calvin said, “It is customary for the wicked imprudently to impugn to the servants of God whatever they themselves do” (Calvin, cited by Hughes).

**Summary:** Paul was forced to become a fool, but he had not, nor would he, take maintenance or trick them; he would simply serve them by giving his substance and self for them because He loved them.

In serving others, Paul was willing to do what he considered foolish. He was willing to work without remuneration, although the more he did, the less he was appreciated. He was willing to give his substance and himself in the cause of Christ for the service of others, but he was not willing to practice deception.

You will always feel underpaid and deserve more if you serve for money. You run the risk of getting angry and bitter. If you serve for the applause of people, you will be disappointed, discouraged, and, perhaps, depressed. You will eventually quit. If you serve for any other selfish reason, you will be tempted to practice deception, but if you serve solely because of Jesus Christ, you will pour out your substance and yourself in service. Jesus Christ is the example. His service determines how far we will go in our service for others. Christian service is sacrificial service.

Products of the “Me” generation might consider sacrificial service foolishness. People in it for the money would consider working without wages as dumb, but those who labor because Christ died for them and they are living for Him are proud of sacrificial service for others. Years ago, before modern means of transportation, Henry Drummond told a missionary about a friend of his who took a delicately nurtured young bride to central Africa. Their new home was three months of African travel from the coast. The missionary asked Drummond, “What would you say if that young wife were your sister.” Drummond replied, “Say? I’d be proud that I had such a sister (Cowman, *Mountain Trails Ways for Youth*, p. 153).

Most agree that service is a virtue. Christianity exalts the ideal of sacrificial service. We who know Him who sacrificed Himself for us are proud to sacrifice ourselves for others in His cause.



# WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

The service begins with the minister of music leading the congregation in singing. During the service, a soloist sings a song and the pastor delivers a message from the Scripture. Why do we do what we do? Why do we sing? Why do we speak? The same question could be asked of all the activities performed in a church. Why do Sunday school teachers teach? Why do others help? Take another illustration, a tough one. Why would a church discipline one of its members? Why do we do what we do? Why should we do all that we do serving in a church?

Several passages of Scripture answer that question. First Corinthians 14 addresses the church service itself. That chapter is the only chapter in the New Testament that talks about what should happen in a church service. Other passages, however, talk about service in general and why it should be done. For example, in 2 Corinthians 12, Paul talked about why he did what he did in Christian service.

## Paul Wrote for Their Edification

*Not for His Benefit* Paul asked, “Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you?” (12:19a). The Greek verb rendered “excuse” means “to defend.” Paul says, “Don’t suppose from what I have written, that is, from my boasting, that I am defending myself to you.” He was not defending himself before them as if they were his judge, nor was he apologizing to them (1 Cor. 4:3-4).

*For their Benefit* Rather, he says, “We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification” (12:19b). As he wrote and spoke about what he did, Paul was aware that he was in Christ before the presence of God. God was his judge (1 Cor. 4:4). Paul did all things for the edification of those he considered his beloved. The word edification means “to build up.” He was not trying to build up his reputation; he was building them up (Hodge).

Why do we do what we do? In one sense, we do it for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), but when it comes to service, a major consideration, if not *the* consideration, is that all things must be done for the edification of those whom we serve. Some serve for self-expression, self-realization, and self-fulfillment. Others react to such a self-centered society and claim that we ought to be doing all to the glory of God, but that is often given in such vague, general terms that no one knows exactly what that means. The New Testament, however, while acknowledging we are fulfilled when we exercise our gift, at the same time, claims we ought to do all for the glory of God and insist service should be done for the edification of believers.

## Paul was Afraid He would find Sin

Having said that he wrote for their edification, Paul explains in more detail why he wrote. What he has to say can be outlined by the verbs that he uses of himself: 1) He feared (12:20), 2) he would mourn (12:21), 3) he would not spare (13:1), 4) he prayed (13:7), and 5) he wrote (13:10).

*Paul’s Fear* “For I fear, lest when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of

wrath, selfish ambitions, backbiting, whisperings, conceits, tumults” (12:20). He wrote as he did because he was afraid that when he came, they would not be where he wanted them to be spiritually, that is, they would be carnal practicing sins as contentions, etc. If that happened, he would not be what they wanted him to be, that is, gentle (1 Cor. 4:21).

The list of sins in verse 20, coupled with the ones in verse 21, is virtually a summary of the sins Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians (Hughes). The Corinthians had been guilty of contentions and jealousies. Those same sins using the same Greek words are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3:3 and here. Although not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3:3 by name, they no doubt had also been guilty of outbursts of angry, self-seeking, evil speaking openly and behind one another’s backs (“backbiting” is speaking evil openly and “whisperings” is secret slander), pride (1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4) as well as a disorder in their divisions and difficulties with each other. The “bottom line” of all the sins mentioned in verse 20 is selfishness.

Elizabeth Chevalier, the author of the best-selling novel, *Driven Woman*, wrote in a letter to Macmillan, “Have you heard the one about the novelist who met an old friend? After they had talked for two hours, the novelist said, ‘Now we’ve talked about me long enough—let’s talk about you! What did you think of my last novel?’”

Paul wanted to edify them, that is, build them up in the faith, because he feared that they were not dealing with sins in their lives. His fear did not promote criticism and condemnation. His fear motivated him to build them up in the faith so they would deal with those sins.

*Paul’s Possible Grief* He would mourn. If Paul arrived in Corinth and some of them were practicing overt sin, he would be deeply grieved. Thus, he adds, “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication and licentiousness which they have practiced” (12:21). Uncleanness can refer to any impurity, but it is often linked to sexual sins in the New Testament. Fornication is any unlawful sexual activity, including adultery and homosexuality. It is at least one form of uncleanness. Licentiousness is an excessive sin that is defiant of public decency. The Corinthians had been guilty of all of these kinds of sin (1 Cor. 6:12-20; 5:1; 11:21). Although some deny that Christians are capable of such sins, this passage indicates that believers can commit all kinds of iniquity. Conversion itself is instantaneous; growth in grace is gradual. As one commentator said, “To make a holy church out of heathen, and in the midst of hedonism, was impossible to any but an almighty arm. And we know that in the work of sanctification of the individual or the community, even Omnipotence works gradually” (Hodge).

Nevertheless, such sins should grieve us. Paul says that if such sins were present when he came, instead of coming in joy (3:2), he would be coming in sorrow (2:1-3). Even though he would say God used it to humble him in such a case, he didn’t want the humbling experience of lamenting unrepentant sin.

What is your response to sin in the life of a believer? Those within the Puritan tradition of Reformed Theology would say anyone committing and continuing in sin, such as fornication, isn’t really a believer in the first place. An all too common response in our day is indifference. Psychologists teach that when a counselee confesses a serious sin, you are not to react in any way. The counselor is to listen stoically and help the counselee “talk it out,” but to aid the counselee in that process, the counselor must remain unemotional and objective. Parents often get angry when they discover that their Christian children are committing serious sins, such as drug abuse.

Perhaps we should ask why we do what we do. Are we thinking of ourselves or our theology? According to Paul, the standard by which we should measure our response is the

believer's edification. If a believer commits serious sin, the response should be grief, not criticism, condemnation, anger, or indifference.

*Paul's Intension* He would not spare. Paul would do more than mourn. He goes on to say, "This will be the third time I am coming to you. By the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established. I have told you before and foretold you as if I were present the second time and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before and to all the rest, that if I come again, I will not spare" (13:1-2). Paul would not only mourn (12:21), but he would confront those who were sinning. The statement, "This is the third time I am coming to you," has been interpreted in two different ways. Those who hold that Paul had visited Corinth twice before writing this letter insist that this statement be taken at face value, namely, that Paul had been there twice and now he is about to come a third time (Plummer; Hodge; Hughes; Tasker; Kruse). Those who claim that Paul had only been to Corinth once point to 2 Corinthians 12:14, which says Paul was only ready to come a third time. In other words, they interpret 2 Corinthians 13:1 in light of 2 Corinthians 12:14. Paul had only been there once and had gotten ready to come again but didn't make the trip (1:15-16, 23; 2:1-4; Barnes). Thus, 2 Corinthians 13:1 means this is the third time I am *ready* to come to you.

The reference to two or three witnesses establishing every word, a quotation from Deuteronomy 19:15, has been interpreted in several different ways. It has been taken to be a reference to Paul's visit, that is, Paul's visits were "witnesses" against the offenders. That is an ancient interpretation accepted by Chrysostom, Calvin, etc. (see Hughes), but that makes one man, Paul, two or three witnesses, which is hardly the intended meaning of Deuteronomy 19:15. Another common interpretation is that when Paul arrives, he will use the law of evidence against anyone accused of sin (Tasker; Hughes).

Paul reminds them that he warned them before about these sins, that is, in 1 Corinthians, and he has warned them again as if he were present the second time. Though he is absent, he is writing to all those who have sinned, meaning the "unrepentant sexual offender of 12:21 (1 Cor. 6:12-20)" (Krause), and to all other believers that when he comes, he will not be lenient. He will confront them.

When sin exists in a church, it is sometimes ignored or avoided, but why do we do what we do? What is the standard by which we determine what we do? According to Paul, we should do what we do to edify others. That means that when they are in unrepentant sin, we confront them.

The charge of weakness had been leveled against Paul (10:10). Paul's critics claimed that an apostle—someone who spoke for Christ—should be a strong individual in presence and speech. Paul's response is that when he came, he would not spare them (13:2), "since you seek a proof of Christ's speaking in me, who is not weak toward you but mighty in you" (13:3). Christ was not weak toward them; He was mighty in (better "among" them). How could the strong Christ be speaking through the "weak" Paul?

He explains, "For though He was crucified in weakness yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you" (13:4). Death is the ultimate humiliation and weakness. Christ voluntarily subjected Himself to that weakness. Resurrection is the ultimate manifestation of power. Thus, Christ was crucified, that is, He was "weak." Then He arose, that is, He was "strong" (Hughes). Likewise, Paul says he was weak (1:8; 4:7-12), but by the power of God, he would live with Christ in strength toward them. Paul is not speaking of the future resurrection but of his coming visit to them to exercise his authority against the disobedient (Hughes). His first visit may have been said to be in weakness (10:10), his next will be in strength (13:2), but it will be strength through weakness (12:10).

Paul abruptly turns the tables on them, saying (Tasker), “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove your own selves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified” (13:5-6). In the Greek text, “you” is emphatic. They were seeking proof that Christ was speaking in Paul (13:3). Now he tells them to examine themselves. The exam is to see whether or not they are “in the faith.” What does that mean? Is Paul questioning whether or not they are believers? Plummer remarks that it is difficult to understand how he could tell them to test themselves as to whether they are in the faith after having said: “by faith you stand” (1:24). He then concludes Paul wrote this passage first!

Indeed, throughout the book, Paul assumes the Corinthians are genuine believers. The book is addressed “to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are in all Achaia” (1:1). He calls them “beloved” (7:1) and “brethren” (8:1). He refers to them as his spiritual children (12:14). Beyond those specific references, the whole tenor of the book is that it is addressed to believers exhorting them to Christ-like living. It is highly unlikely, if not odd, that he would question their salvation at the end of the book.

The issue is, “What is the meaning of the phrase ‘in the faith.’” “Elsewhere, Paul uses the phrase “not of one being justified or regenerated, but of one operating within the confines of Christian conviction” (1 Cor. 16:13; Titus 1:13; Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, pp. 200-201).

Paul asks, “Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you” (13:5). The Greek text indicates that Paul expected an affirmative answer. The question is, what is it Paul was sure they knew? What does he mean by “Jesus Christ is in you?” In this context, that phrase seems to mean Christ was working in and even through them. They sought proof of Christ speaking in Paul (13:3). Paul says to examine yourselves to see if Christ is speaking in you.

There is the possibility that they could examine themselves and be disqualified! Hodge says the idea that they were abandoned to everlasting perdition is “obviously not the sense here.” That is true, for, in the next verse, Paul says, “But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified” (13:6). In speaking of his own disqualification, did Paul mean to imply that he could not be a genuine believer? That is not even remotely the issue in this passage. The issue is whether or not Christ was speaking in Paul (13:3). What was possible is that Christ was not speaking in Paul or them! In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul uses the word “disqualified” of his service, not his salvation.

In his book, *Once Saved, Always Saved*, Kendall, the [former] pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, says, “In 2 Corinthians 13:5-7, Paul takes up with them the question of accreditation and expresses himself to the effect that it matters little to them whether he himself seems to be “approved” so long as they show themselves approved by Jesus Christ being manifest in them. Paul is not turning on them at the last moment and raising the question of whether or not they were even saved (how often people quote 2 Corinthians 13:5 out of context); he challenges them to prove his own worth in light of his apostleship being questioned. The Greek does not read, “Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith”; it is rather, “examine yourselves if you are in the faith.” *As they were seeking a proof of Christ speaking through Paul (2 Corinthians 13:3), Paul turns on them and asks them to prove that Christ is speaking through them.* Thus, he says that Jesus Christ is speaking in them unless they have failed the test (2 Corinthians 5). The contrast is not that of being saved or lost, but whether or not, as saved people, Christ is openly manifest in them. This kind of testing is not exactly the same thing as being “tried by fire” at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Although the notion of being proved by testing is not completely unrelated, there is a certain test that will prove whether or not Christ is speaking through us. The test does not await the Judgment Seat of Christ, but one cannot but notice how important it is to

be so utterly yielded to the Lord that we know that he is speaking through us. It is this kind of obedience that will be tried on the last day” (Kendall, p. 74, italics added).

Thus, the point of 2 Corinthians 13:1-5 is that if the Corinthians had not dealt with the open, overt sin before he came, he would confront the situation when he arrived. Part of edifying others in Christian ministry is to confront them when they refuse to deal with their sin.

*Paul’s Prayer* “Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified” (13:7). Paul prayed that the Corinthians would not do that which was evil or wicked, probably a reference to the sins listed in 2 Corinthians 12:20 and 21. The purpose of his prayer (see “that;” Plummer says Paul gives the purpose, not the content of the prayer) was not that he would appear approved as an apostle, but that they would do what is good (Hodge). The word translated “honorable” means “good, excellent, beautiful.” That which is morally good is beautiful to behold.

If the Corinthians abstained from evil and practiced good, Paul might seem disqualified, that is, as an apostle. How can that be? Paul explains, “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (13:8). The Greek text says, “We have no power against the truth.” If they were practicing truth when he came, Paul would not have power against it, meaning he would have no need to exercise apostolic authority by using stern measures (13:2). He would only exercise his apostolic authority on behalf of the truth when error and evil were present. By not demonstrating his apostolic authority, he might seem weak and, thus, be disqualified as an apostle. He would rather his apostleship not be demonstrated than they do evil and demonstrate it by discipline and, thus, proving by their standards that Christ was speaking in him.

He would gladly appear weak as he explained, “For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong” (13:9a). If they were strong in that they did not continue in evil and Paul appeared weak because he didn’t have to exercise authority to discipline, he would rejoice! (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker).

“And this also we pray that you may be made complete” (13:9b). The Greek word translated “to be made complete” was used of setting bones and reconciling alienated parties. Paul was praying that reconciliation (12:20) and restoration (12:21) would happen.

Part of edifying others is to pray for them. Our prayers are often vague and general or limited to physical healing. How often have you prayed for someone to grow spiritually versus how many times have you prayed for the Lord to be with someone who was physically sick?

*Paul’s Letter* Paul concludes, “Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction” (13:10). Paul prayed that the Corinthians would be reconciled and restored and he wrote this very epistle to that end so that when he came, he would not have to be sharp and severe. He confronted them on paper so he would not have to do it in person (10:11; 12:20; 13:2; Hodge). Paul wrote when absent because he did not want to exercise his authority when present, an authority the Lord had given him to build them up, not tear them down. Even the authority to discipline was constructed, not destructive. Paul did all things for their edification (12:19).

Paul not only prayed (13:7-9), but he also did something (13:10) for their edification. In this case, he wrote them a letter. Have you ever written someone a letter to encourage their spiritual growth?

**Summary:** Since I fear that when I come, I will find sin, and I’ll have to demonstrate my apostolic authority through discipline, I pray and write for your repentance, reconciliation, and restoration. In short, I am writing not for my sake but yours, that is, for your edification.

Why do we do what we do in our service for the Lord? According to the apostle Paul in this passage, we should edify others. While there is a sense in which we do all to the glory of God, we must never lose sight of the fact that in Christian service, we are also doing all to edify others. While it is true that when we exercise our spiritual gifts, we express ourselves as God made us, we must never forget that even the exercise of our spiritual gift is for the edification of other believers.

Church services are for edification. The one passage in the Bible that describes what ought to go on in a church service is 1 Corinthians 14. The backdrop of that passage was the abuse of the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. In attempting to rectify the situation, Paul regulates the use of tongues and makes explicitly clear that the purpose of the church service is edification (1 Cor. 14:5, 12, 19, esp. verse 26). A minister of music should design a service for the edification of the church. The soloist should choose hymns and sing them for the edification of the body. The pastor must deliver messages that build up the saints. Interestingly enough, when the aim of the service is the edification of believers, unbelievers come to Christ (1 Cor. 14:23-25) and God is worshiped (1 Cor. 14:25).

Church services are for edification and Christian service is for edification. When you serve whatever you do, whether it is teaching or helping in some way, remember the goal is to edify. Take, for example, the “ministry” of discipline. Why do we do what we do? Is the purpose of discipline punishment? No, the purpose of discipline is restoration and edification.

Let me put it all like this. We do what we do in church services and Christian service, not for entertainment, nor for the expression of some spiritual gift, not even for extolling the virtues of God, but all that we do must be done for the edification of believers. Oddly enough, other things might be included when that is done. In other words, entertainment might be perfectly appropriate for getting a chance to edify. Obviously, if a spiritual gift is expressed properly, there will be edification. If God’s virtues are extolled in the biblical sense of the term, edification will result. All things must be done for edification.

In our service, we should ask, “What can I do for you?” not “What can you do for me?”

What can I do for you, Madam?” Abraham Lincoln asked an elderly lady who had been ushered into his private office. She placed a covered basket on the table and said, “Mr. President, I have come here today not to ask any favor for myself or anyone. I heard you were very fond of cookies and I came here to bring you this basket!” Tears trickled down the gaunt face of the great President. He stood speechless momentarily, then said, “My good woman, your thoughtful and unselfish deed greatly moves me. Since I became President, thousands have come into this office, but you are the only one to come asking no favor for yourself or somebody else!”

John F. Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Perhaps we are asking the wrong question.

## A GOD-BLESSED CHURCH

For what kind of church are you looking? What kind of church would you like to have? What kind of church should this church be? Apparently, many are looking for a friendly church. At least, that is the impression one gets from the comments of first-time visitors. They will say, “I didn’t go back because they were not friendly,” or “I liked that church; it’s friendly.” Others are seeking a church with a family ministry. If you have a baby, you want a church with a good nursery. If you have children, you want a church with a good children’s program. If you have teenagers, you want a church with a dynamic youth ministry. Of course, there needs to be something for mom and dad, but what can this church do for my family? Some are searching for a church where they can find a mate. On more than one occasion, a young lady told me, “I love your church, but there are no eligible men here. I’ve got to go to another church.”

Let me ask again. For what kind of church should you be looking? What kind of church should we have? What kind of church should we be? There are many ways to describe the “ideal church.” One way is to say we need a “God-blessed church.” Having said that, what are we talking about? What are the characteristics of a church God blesses? What would we as a church have to do to receive God’s blessing upon us?

Paul concludes 2 Corinthians with a paragraph that includes an exhortation (13:11), a salutation (13:12-13) and a benediction (13:14). In the process of writing the final paragraph of 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul describes a God-blessed church.

### Exhortation

*Farewell* Paul begins his closing paragraph with a series of short exhortations, the first of which is, “Finally, brethren, farewell” (13:11a). The Greek word rendered “farewell” means either 1) rejoice or 2) farewell. Here as in other passages like this one, it no doubt means rejoice (Phil. 3:1; 1 Thess. 5:16). If his prayer was answered (13:7-9) and his instructions followed (13:10), joy would be the result (Hodge). If not, the result would be grief, not gladness (12:20). Obedience produces joy. Jesus said, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things have I spoken to you that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full” (Jn. 15:10-11).

Ancient Israel sinned and, as a result, was conquered and carried into exile. Gradually, some of them returned. They rebuilt the temple. Then, they built the wall around Jerusalem. In the process of rebuilding the wall, the people discovered the Scriptures. Nehemiah 8 describes how they all stood before the Watergate as Ezra read the Word of God. When the people heard the Scripture read, they wept but were told not to mourn and weep, rather, simply do what the Scriptures told them to do. They did. The text says they rejoiced greatly when they obeyed the Word of God (see Neh. 8:12).

*Be Complete* Next, Paul exhorts, “Become complete” (13:11b). The Greek word rendered “be complete” was used of setting bones and reconciling parties. Paul prayed for this (13:9), and now he admonishes the Corinthians to work toward it. In the overall context of this passage, he is exhorting them to be reconciled to each other (12:20) and restored to the Lord (12:21). In other words, he didn’t want sexual sins practiced by them (12:21), nor did he want them practicing

contentions, jealousies, outbursts of anger, selfishness, backbiting, whisperings, conceits and tumults (12:20).

To grow to spiritual maturity, you must lay aside sin. The apostle Peter says, “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy and all evil speaking as newborn babes desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow thereby if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pet. 2:1-3). Both Paul and Peter exhorted believers to lay aside sin so they could move toward spiritual completeness and maturity.

*Be Exhorted* Then he commands, “Be of good comfort” (13:11c). The Greek word translated “comfort” means “be exhorted, encouraged, comforted or of good cheer.” Here, this could mean, “Listen to my exhortations and entreaties (Plummer). They would be comforted and of good cheer, if they heeded this appeal.

*Be Unified* To these, he adds, “Be of one mind” (13:11d). This is an exhortation to harmony and unity. One of the major sins of the Corinthians was division (12:20; 1 Cor. 1-4). Closely connected is the next exhortation, “Live in peace” (13:11). If inwardly they were of one mind, outwardly they would live in peace.

*Live in Peace* The result would be “And the God of love and peace will be with you” (13:11e). If believers love each other and live in peace, the blessing of God, the author of love and peace, will be upon them. In other words, Paul is telling the Corinthians that if they follow his exhortation to lay aside sin and move toward spiritual maturity and unity, they will have the blessing of God upon them, which means they will experience love, peace, and joy (see Tasker).

In his epistle, James tells us that there are two kinds of wisdom. Earthly wisdom, which is “earthly, sensual, demonic” (Jas. 3:15), is self-seeking and jealous (Jas. 3:14). Godly wisdom, on the other hand, is “first pure, then peaceable” (Jas. 4:17), meaning that there is a wisdom that is pure in motive and seeks peace and harmony among people. James teaches that if a congregation of people lives by the first kind of wisdom, there will be “confusion and every evil thing” (Jas. 3:16). If a congregation is led by godly wisdom, there will be peace (Jas. 3:18). A God-blessed church is one in which the people are setting aside sin, seeking spiritual maturity, and setting their sights on living in peace and harmony with each other. In that kind of congregation, God blesses with His love, joy, and peace.

## Salutation

*Greet One Another* The salutation part of the concluding paragraph begins with the exhortation to “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (13:12). People greet each other with a spoken word like “Hi, how are you?,” with a handshake, and with a brief embrace. Paul taught that believers should greet one another with a kiss, an outward sign of inward affection (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:26; see also 1 Pet. 5:14). This kiss was to be holy, excluding erotic overtones. In the synagogue, men kissed men and women kissed women (Plummer). It is assumed that practice was followed in the church.

On a visit to Israel, I observed that on more than one occasion, the Jews there greeted one another with a kiss on the cheek that was not limited to men kissing men or women kissing women. Men and women greeted each other with a brief embrace and kissed each other on the cheek.

Psychologists tell us that people need to be touched. Studies have shown that cuddled infants gained weight faster and were healthier than those not. Christians should not be afraid to touch one another.



*Be Greeted* Paul adds, “All the saints greet you” (13:13). “All” refers to all the saints where Paul was when he was writing, that is, in Macedonia, probably Philippi.

## Benediction

Paul concludes with a benediction, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen” (13:14). Paul invokes the blessing of the triune God.

*The Grace of the Son* The blessing of the Son is grace (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker). Earlier, Paul spoke of the grace of Christ, that is, the favor He did us by becoming poor so that we could be rich (8:9). Now Paul desires that other favors would flow from Christ to his readers

*The Love of the Father* The blessing of God is His love (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker). The love of God comes from the God of love (13:11) and is upon those who live in peace and harmony with other saints (13:11).

*The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit* The blessing of the Holy Spirit is His communion (Plummer; Hodge; Tasker). The word rendered “communion” is *koinonia*, which means “fellowship.” The Holy Spirit gives believers fellowship with God and each other.

Grace is how we discover love, and love is the basis for fellowship. That is what Paul desires for all in the church. They should love and enjoy each other, not fight and do battle with each other (12:20). They needed grace, not self-seeking, love, not anger, communion, not contention.

**Summary:** Live in harmony with each other so that the blessings of God will be upon you.

What kind of church should a church be? All kinds of answers could be given to that question. A number of passages of Scripture need to be examined to provide a complete answer to this critical question. The church needs to be based on the Scriptures, and it must be concerned with evangelism and world missions. This passage, however, emphasizes that for God to bless a congregation, the people in it need to set aside sin, seek spiritual maturity, and set their sights on living in harmony and peace with each other. They must love each other. This passage is not exhaustive, but it is essential. When the people in a church love each other, the blessing of a Triune God will rest upon them.

What kind of church do you want? Some insist on a church with a shingle with a denominational name. People have told me they like our nondenominational church, but they were reared in a denominational church and must have the shingle with the denominational name. Others want a steeple, a building that looks like a church. Visitors said they would not return to our church because we met in a gym. Then, some want stained glass. We are not “high church” enough for them.

There’s nothing wrong with a denominational tag or a church building (I wish ours was built), but I’d rather have a group of people who love the Lord and each other meeting in a tent than have a beautiful cathedral with contention and strife.

Many brides about to get married have experienced being told that their gowns was not ready. I once performed a wedding where that happened to a bride who got particularly nervous. I knew her well, so I had the freedom to say to her, “Look, don’t lose your ‘sanctification’ over this. Don’t get so impatient and uptight that you begin to become sharp with people. A wedding gown is nice, but I’d rather be married in jeans with love present than in a beautiful gown with contention. The basis of a blessed marriage is love, not a beautiful gown. I long ago learned that a beautiful wedding, a happy marriage doth not make.”

My oldest daughter had a similar experience when she got married. She found a gown in a magazine that she liked. We ordered it, but it was the wrong size when it arrived. Then, there was one mix-up after another until finally, it became evident that the gown would not be ready in time. At that point, I reminded my daughter of the “jeans principle.” I suggested that she be patient and trust the Lord. On a lark, she stumbled into another bridal shop and found her dress on the rack in her size. Someone else had ordered it and failed to purchase it. At the last possible moment, the Lord supplied the dress she wanted.

When believers do what the Lord told them to, mainly living a loving, peaceful lifestyle, the Lord will bless and intervene for them.

## IN DEFENSE OF THE MINISTER

Years ago, I was in a church to speak for a week. The pastor was discouraged. One day during the week, he said, “I’m tired of living in a fishbowl.” One of the occupational hazards of being in any public arena is that you are constantly observed, evaluated, judged, criticized, and condemned. As a pastor, I know the experience well. I have been criticized for the way I talk (I have a southern accent), for the way I walk (I strut!), for the way I preach (“He doesn’t preach the Word”), and I have been accused of being unfriendly, uncaring, and intimidating to people. I have had my motives and integrity questioned. I’m not alone. All pastors experience this kind of treatment. Indeed, all Christian workers do. The apostle Paul was severely criticized more than once. On one occasions, he wrote a letter to defend himself. That letter was 2 Corinthians. It answers the question about defending the minister and reveals several other things.

Here’s what happened. After Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and it was sent to Corinth by Titus, he became deeply concerned about what he had written. He called them carnal (1 Cor. 3:1) and said some of them were proud (1 Cor. 4:18). He left Ephesus and went to Troas but did not find Titus there (2:12-13). He then departed for Macedonia (2:13), where he met Titus (2 7:6-7), probably at Philippi. Titus informed him that the church still supported him, although there were people who were highly critical of him, getting the ear of the Corinthians. They were casting doubts on his integrity.

Paul was accused of walking according to the flesh (1:12, 17; 10:2), being deceitful (2:17; 4:2; 12:16), intimidating with his letters (10:9-10), unjustly mistreating someone to the point of ruining him (7:2), and defrauding people (7:2). More specifically, he promised to return and didn’t (1:15-17, 23; 2:1-4), he mishandled the discipline of the incestuous member (7:2; 10:8; 13:7-10; see also 2:5-11), and he didn’t take money on his first trip, but was planning on “fleecing the flock” under the guise of a collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem on his next trip (8:20).

That situation produced several problems. First and foremost, those accusations raised questions in the minds of the Corinthians. They began to withdraw from Paul, at least emotionally. Then, there was the issue of how Paul handled the situation personally. Would he be discouraged? What about the people making the accusations? Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to defend himself, and in the process, he answered all of these questions.

Second Corinthians is the least systematic of Paul’s letters. Consequently, analysis is difficult. The major divisions are clear. The development within those divisions is sometimes not so clear. Someone has observed, “It resembles an African river. For a time, it flows smoothly, and one is hopeful for a satisfactory analysis. Then suddenly there comes a mighty cataract and a terrific upheaval on the great depths of his heart are broken up” (Lee in the *Outlined Bible*).

The overall format is that of an ancient letter. It consists of a salutation, thanksgiving, body, greetings, and a benediction. Only the customary prayer is omitted. The salutation identifies the author as Paul, Timothy being associated with him (1:1). The recipients are the Corinthians as well as all the saints in all Achaia (1:1). The address is the customary grace and peace. The thanksgiving consists of praise to God, who allowed Paul to suffer, to teach him not to trust himself but the Lord, to train others, and to turn all to thank Him (1:3-11). The body of the book is as follows:

## Consolation

*The Conduct of Paul (1:12-2:11)* The first major issue in the book's body is his conduct, including his integrity and involvement in the case of the incestuous member. Paul's integrity had been questioned. He had said he was coming to visit them (1 Cor. 16:5-7), but he had not done so (1:15-16). He was accused of walking according to the flesh (1:17). He had instructed the Corinthians to discipline an incestuous brother (1 Cor. 5). As a result, he was criticized for being destructive (10:8; 13:8).

Thus, Paul begins by declaring his integrity, that is, he was a man of godly sincerity (1:12-14) and he defends his failure to come (1:15-2:4), explaining that he did not come for their benefit and his (1:23-24). In the midst of that discussion, Paul digresses and proclaims that his preaching was true and trustworthy (1:18-22). The point is that when a minister's integrity is questioned to the point that his message is doubted, he needs to defend his integrity to protect the message.

Next, Paul explains that the sinning member had not caused him grief, but he had grieved the church (2:5). This sinning member had also been sufficiently disciplined (2:6), so the Corinthians should forgive him lest more damage be done (2:7-11). Paul tells them he loves them (2:4) and he wants them to love one another (2:8).

Men in the ministry live in a "fishbowl." Everything they do is open to public view and inspection. Consequently, they are constantly criticized. The only way to avoid criticism is to not get out of bed in the morning. The question is, "When does a man defend himself." If he defended himself against every criticism, he would spend all of his time answering his critics. When a minister's integrity is questioned to the point that his message is doubted, he needs to defend his integrity to protect his message. Paul was criticized for not returning and for his dealing with the discipline problem. These questions were causing in the minds of the Corinthians, so Paul answered them. He had legitimate reasons for doing what he had done and he gives them to the Corinthians.

*The Character of the Ministry (2:12-7:4)* At this point in the epistle, Paul returns to his care and concern for the Corinthians (2:4 and 2:12-13). Then, he spontaneously bursts forth with a hymn of praise (2:14-17). Although his concern for them caused great anxiety, ministering Christ out of love and godly sincerity produced praise to God for the privilege of ministry. There is a triumph in ministry! This introduces an extended digression concerning the character of the ministry (that is, from 2:14-6:10).

For example, Paul elaborates on a minister's credentials. Although letters of recommendation have their proper place, a minister's credentials are people to whom he has successfully ministered (3:1-3). He expounds on the glory of the ministry. Since God Himself is our sufficiency and the ministry He has given us is glorious, we speak with great boldness (3:4-18). He explains that realizing the nature of the New Testament ministry prevents discouragement and deceitfulness and provokes a minister to preach Christ and practice servanthood (4:1-6).

There is more. Paul expands on what he says in his opening paragraph (1:3-11). On the purpose of trials, he adds the insight that God puts the great treasure of the knowledge of His Son in earthen vessels and lets that vessel experience constant difficulty, even facing death for the good of others and ultimately for the glory of God (4:7-15). He also explains what he said earlier about preventing discouragement (4:1-6), adding that discouragement is preventable by making eternal reward one's aim (4:6-5:10).

The proper motives for ministry are the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ (5:11-21). Thus, Paul says that through his experience, he conducted himself to give no offense and commend himself to others (6:1-10).

After the digression on the character of the ministry, Paul appeals to the Corinthians not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers and, thus, be defiled before the Lord and damage their relationship with other believers (6:11-7:4). He pleads with them to open their hearts to him (6:13-7:2), insisting that he has wronged no one, corrupted no one, defrauded no one (7:2).

Several great lessons can be gleaned from this section of 2 Corinthians. In this extended passage, Paul teaches that despite trials, there is a triumph in ministry. He also declares that it is a glorious ministry that he wouldn't think of quitting. Although accused of using ministry for personal gain, Paul insisted that he would be proven sincere and his ministry was based on faith.

*The Comfort of Paul (7:5-16)* In 2 Corinthians 7:5, Paul picks up where he left off at 2 Corinthians 2:13. He tells them that he is encouraged through their obedience to the Word and their love for each other (7:5-16).

## Collection

*The Model for Giving (8:1-7)* Paul begins the discussion concerning the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem with an example worthy of imitation. Even though they were in great affliction and deep poverty (8:1-2), by God's grace, the Macedonians gave themselves to the Lord and to others (8:5) and freely gave beyond their means (8:3-4). When believers see how greatly they have been blessed spiritually and how generously others give materially, they should be motivated to give too (8:1-7).

*Guidelines for Giving (8:8-15)* Their guidelines for giving include 1) Giving should be motivated by love (8:7-9), 2) giving should be regulated by a willingness and an ability to give (8:10-12), and 3) giving should be generated by equality (8:13-16).

*The Handling of the Collection (8:16-23)* Once the money is collected, it should be appropriately handled to go to what it has been given for, not something or someone else. Paul describes the character of the men handling the money (8:16-23) and concludes that knowing that when the money is collected, it will be handled by trustworthy men in an honorable way should motivate a believer to prove his love for the Lord by generously giving (8:24).

*The Collection of the Funds (9:1-5)* Since the Corinthians were ready and willing to give (9:1-2), Paul sent a delegation to collect their willing blessing (9:3-5). Besides, their willingness was known, and the collection completion would prevent embarrassment (9:3-4).

*The Result of Giving. (9:6-15)* Paul concludes this section on giving by delineating the results of their gift. He tells the Corinthians that if they give freely and generously and trust God to supply their need as well as a bumper crop (9:6-10), the result will be that they, others, and God will be blessed (9:11-15).

## Correction

*Paul's Authority (10:1-18)* In the third and final major section of 2 Corinthians, Paul vindicates his apostleship, his authority. He specifically speaks to the criticism leveled against him and the challenge to his authority.

One of the most serious charges against him was that he walked according to the flesh (1:17; 10:2). He insists that he did not war according to the flesh and, therefore, was ready to punish disobedience (10:1-6). Furthermore, he had authority and would use it to deal with his critics when he came (10:7-11). He was not commending himself but boasting about what God had given him (10:12-18).

*Paul's Boast about Support (11:1-15)* Speaking of boasting (10:12-18), Paul asked them to bear with him while he readily boasts about something. He did this because he loved them and because they were willing to listen to false teachers (11:1-6). Paul could boast that he received support from others so that he could preach the gospel without charge and not be a burden to them (11:7-15).

*Paul's Boast about Service (11:16-33)* There is more. He explains that he foolishly boasted because of what his critics did and the Corinthians were listening (11:16-21). The fact is he could boast about his ancestry and service more than his critics. On the other hand, he would rather boast about his weakness (11:22-33).

*Paul's Boasts about Weakness (12:1-10)* Moreover, even though he could have boasted in revelations he received, he would rather boast and even take please in weakness because it was then he was strong by God's grace and power (12:1-10).

*Paul's Service (12:11-18)* He tells them that they have forced him to become a fool by bragging, but he has not, nor will he, take support from them, nor has he tricked them. He will serve them by giving his substance and himself to them because he loved them (12:11-18). He is a fool; he is not deceitful.

*Paul's Aim (12:19-13:10)* Paul insists that he wrote for their edification, not for his own benefit (12:19), because he was afraid that he would find sin when he came and would have to demonstrate his apostolic authority by exercising it (12:20-13:10).

*Benediction (13:11-14)* He concludes the letter with a short series of exhortations, greetings, and a benediction (13:11-14). He urges them to live in harmony with one another so that the blessing of God will be with them.

**Summary:** Paul was comforted during the trials of the ministry by the obedience of the Corinthians and their love. Nevertheless, he insisted that the nature of the New Testament ministry prevented deceitfulness and discouragement, that they should complete the collection they had begun, that he did have apostolic authority, and if needed, would deal with disobedience when he came.

All ministers of Jesus Christ encounter criticism. For the minister, this is a trial. God allows His servants to undergo these trials to teach him not to trust Himself (1:9). The servant learns through difficulty that when he is weak, he is strong in the Lord (12:9-10). At the same time, the servant of the Lord must maintain his integrity (1:12) and do all that he does in his ministry for the edification of others (12:19, 13:10).

Many other comparatively minor lessons can be learned concerning the ministry from this book. For example, those in the ministry might have to exercise church discipline (2:5-11). He must also collect money (8-9) and sometimes defend himself (10-12).

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