

# Study of 2 Corinthians

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## Introductory 2 Corinthians

### I. Background

Review the introduction to 1 Corinthians for the background of the founding of the Corinthian church.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, where he had been ministering for three years. He sent this letter to the church by Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17), but problems in the church only grew worse. Perhaps it was young Timothy's timidity that made the believers at Corinth disobey Paul's words. At any rate, Paul then sent Titus to Corinth to make sure the church obeyed the apostolic orders Paul had given them (2 Cor. 7:13–15).

Meanwhile, the riot discussed in Acts 19:23–41 forced Paul to leave Ephesus. Paul had promised the Corinthians that he would visit them (1 Cor. 16:3–7), but circumstances were such that he was delayed along the way. He had hoped to meet Titus at Troas (2 Cor. 2:12–13), but this plan failed. As you read 2 Cor. 1–2, you feel the burden and heartache of Paul, suffering both physically and emotionally. While at Troas, Paul did some preaching, then made his way to Macedonia. He and Titus finally met, probably at Philippi (2 Cor. 7:5–6), and Titus gave Paul the good news that the majority at Corinth were behind him and would obey his word. It was this joy that prompted him to write this second letter to the Corinthians.

### II. Purposes

Paul had several purposes in mind when he wrote this letter:

(1) To commend the church for disciplining the offender (1 Cor. 5), and to encourage them to forgive and receive him (2 Cor. 2:6–11).

(2) To explain why he had apparently “changed his plans” and not visited them as he had promised (1 Cor. 16:3–7, 2 Cor. 1:15–22).

(3) To answer those in the church who were questioning his apostolic authority (2 Cor. 10–12).

(4) To answer those who accused him of wrong motives (2 Cor. 4:1–2).

(5) To encourage the church to share in the offering for the Jerusalem saints (2 Cor. 8–9).

(6) To prepare them for his planned visit (2 Cor. 13).

This letter is in direct contrast to the tone of 1 Corinthians, for it is intensely personal and filled with the deep emotions of the dedicated apostle. If 1 Corinthians “takes the roof off” the church at Corinth and lets us look in, then 2 Corinthians “opens the heart” of Paul and lets us see his love and concern for the work of the Lord. In the first letter, Paul

is the instructor, answering questions and setting matters right; in this second letter he is the loving pastor, the minister of Christ, pouring out his life that his spiritual children might be perfected in the faith.

No letter in the NT reveals the true character of the Christian ministry as does this one. No letter says so much about Christian giving, suffering, or spiritual triumph.

## 2 Corinthians 1

Few chapters in the NT reveal the heart of Paul as does this one. Here we see the great apostle admitting his fears and failings as he tells of the sufferings he had endured. The problem of pain has always perplexed thinking people. “Why must the righteous suffer?” is a question that is found in Scripture from Job to Revelation. In this chapter, as Paul recounts his personal experiences, he gives us three reasons why God permits His people to suffer.

### I. That We Might Comfort Others (1:1–7)

The word “comfort” is used ten times in vv. 1–7 (“consolation” in 5, 6, and 7) and literally means “to call to one’s side.” It is the same word Jesus used in John 14:16 for the Spirit, the Comforter (Paraclete). What a joy it is to know that God stands at our side to help whenever we go through troubles (Isa. 41:10, 13; 43:2–3). Each member of the Trinity is a comforter: the Father (2 Cor. 1:3), and the Son and Spirit (John 14:16). God is the God of all comfort, just as He is the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10). There is comfort and grace for every situation!

But this comfort that we receive from God is not simply for our personal relief; it is shared with us that we might be able to help others. Paul went through tribulation (1:4 and 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2) that he might be able to minister to others. God prepares us for what He is preparing for us. We cannot lead others where we have not been ourselves. Paul looked upon his trials as “the sufferings of Christ” (1:5 and 4:10–11); as he states in Phil. 3:10, he was experiencing the “fellowship of His sufferings.” This does not mean that we share in the sufferings of Christ to atone for our sin, since that was a ministry He alone could perform. Rather, it suggests that we suffer for His sake and for His glory, and that He suffers with us (see Acts 9:4).

The mathematics of God’s mercy is wonderful! As the trials abound, the comfort of God abounds as well! Where sin abounds, so does grace (Rom. 5:20)! Paul used this word “abound” often in 2 Corinthians, so check your concordance for these references. In v. 6 Paul teaches the wonderful truth that a Christian’s affliction brings a double blessing: first, to the individual believer (“effectual” means that it works in the believer; see 1 Thes. 2:13; Phil. 2:12–13), and then to others. We as Christians ought to be willing to endure trials, since we know they bring spiritual good to us personally, and blessings to others as we share God’s comfort with them. The Gk. word for “partakers” in v. 7 can also mean “fellowship” or “partners.” We ought to be willing “partners” with Christ in suffering since this “partnership” leads to comfort and edification.

## **II. That We Might Have Confidence in God Alone (1:8–11)**

It takes a great soul to admit failure. Paul bares his heart here and shares with the believers the troubles he endured in Asia. He wrote this not to win their sympathy, but to teach them the lesson he learned: trust God alone. We are not sure just what trouble Paul is referring to; probably it involved the riot in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:23–41 and 1 Cor. 15:32) as well as the sad news of the troubles in the Corinthian church. In 7:5 he indicates that there were troubles without and within; so perhaps it was both physical weakness and danger as well as spiritual concern for the infant church at Corinth. Whatever these troubles were, they were sufficient to crush Paul and cause him to pass sentence on his life! He despaired even of life itself! (How comforting to know that even the great saints of God are still made of clay!) But Paul learned the lesson God had for him: he would not trust himself, but God alone. Note the three tenses of the believer's deliverance in v. 10, and compare Titus 2:11–15. However, Paul is quick to acknowledge the helpful prayer of his friends (v. 11). He states that his deliverance in answer to prayer will cause many to praise God and give Him the glory He deserves.

We have come a long way in our Christian lives when we learn to put faith in God alone and not in self, circumstances, or men. Abraham took Lot with him, and Lot left for Sodom. Moses insisted on Aaron's help, and Aaron led the people into sin. David's choice advisers deserted him. Even the disciples forsook Christ and fled! The believer who fears the Lord and lives to please Him enjoys peace and confidence even in the midst of trouble. What a lesson to learn!

## **III. That We Might Claim the Promises of God (1:12–24)**

The connection between this passage about Paul's plans and the general topic of suffering is easy to see; but by understanding the background, we can follow Paul's thinking. Paul had promised to visit Corinth, first when he made his way to Macedonia, and then a second time as he headed to Jerusalem with the special offering. This is the "double blessing" mentioned in v. 15 ("second benefit"). But circumstances forced him to change his plans, and his enemies at Corinth accused him of being fickle and undependable. "You cannot trust Paul's letters!" they said. "All the same he claims these letters are God's message to us!"

Paul answered these charges by showing that he was sincere in promising them two visits, and that his motives were pure and godly. He assured them that his letters were honest and trustworthy, as they will discover when Christ returns to judge (vv. 12–14). It was Paul's confidence in their love and understanding (vv. 15–16) that led him to change his plans. One paraphrase puts it: "It was because I was so sure of your understanding and trust that I planned to stop and see you on my way to Macedonia" (TLB). Where there are love and confidence, there should never be doubt or questions about motives. Paul was not like the men of the world who say "Yes" when they mean "No." It is here that Paul teaches us a lasting lesson: the Word of God is trustworthy, and all the promises of God find their "Yes" in Jesus Christ. One way to translate v. 20 is, "All the promises of God find their yes in Christ, and through Him we say amen." In other words, the promises of God are true in Christ—He fulfills them, and He gives us the faith to claim them.

How grateful we ought to be for the unchanging Word of God! Often it takes trouble and trial in our lives before we claim and trust the promises of God. We make plans, but God overrules them. We make promises and are not always able to keep them. But in Christ, all the promises of God's Word find their fulfillment, and in Him we have the power to claim these promises for ourselves and our situation.

In the closing verses (vv. 21–24), Paul reminds the believers that his Christian life came from God. He was established in Christ by the Spirit, anointed and sealed, and had been given the earnest (down payment) of the Spirit. How could he be insincere when the Spirit was working in his life? The sealing of the Spirit refers to the work of the Spirit in marking us for eternal salvation. Once we have trusted Christ, we are sealed and secure in Him (Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30). The “earnest” refers to the blessings of the Spirit in our lives today which are but a “down payment” of the eternal blessings we will enjoy in glory (see Rom. 8:9, 14, 23; Eph. 1:14).

Finally, Paul states that he was glad God changed the planned trip, because it would have been necessary for him to rebuke them at that time had he visited them. Instead of sailing from Ephesus to Corinth, he had traveled to Troas and Philippi, and thus had given the church more time to straighten things out. A visit at that time would have been painful; but, now that matters had been attended to (2:6–11), he could visit them in joy and not in grief.

## 2 Corinthians 2

In this chapter, Paul continues his explanation of the changed plans (1:15ff) and shows his love and concern for the church and its spiritual needs.

### I. Paul's Tears over the Church (2:1–4)

In 11:23–28, Paul lists the many trials he had endured for Christ's sake, and he names as the greatest burden “the care of all the churches” (v. 28). A true shepherd, Paul had these infant churches on his heart and on his shoulders, like the High Priest of Israel (Ex. 28:12–21). Tears are an important part of a spiritual ministry. Jesus wept; Paul ministered with tears (Acts 20:19 and 31); and Ps. 126:5–6 states that there will be no harvest apart from tears.

Paul did not want to visit the church as a stern father, but as a loving friend. The church should have brought joy to his heart, not sorrow. If he had made them sorry, how could they in turn make him glad? He wanted to give them time to make matters right in the church; then he would visit them and their fellowship would be joyful. When he wrote to them, he wrote with a pen dipped in tears. He even wept over that letter. (v. 4). (He may be referring to 1 Corinthians, or to an even sterner letter that we do not have.)

In chapter 1, Paul's theme was abundant comfort; here it is abundant love. “Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8). Where there is love, there is always the burden to see others enjoy the very best. How many times pastors weep over wayward Christians. Yet God honored Paul's tears and worked in the church so that sin was put away.

## **II. Paul's Testimony to the Offender (2:5–11)**

This section takes us back to 1 Cor. 5, where Paul had admonished the church to discipline the man who was living in open sin. Here Paul states that the offender did not cause Paul alone trouble and sorrow: he had brought trouble to the whole church! He had instructed them to call the church together and dismiss this man from the fellowship. This act of discipline would then bring him to a place of sorrow and repentance. Well, they had done this, but then they went to the opposite extreme! The man had evidenced sorrow for sin, but the church was not willing to receive him back after his confession!

“Forgive him and take him back,” says the apostle. “If you don’t, Satan will overburden him with too much sorrow.” How often Christians confess their sins and yet fail to believe that God will forgive and forget. There is an abnormal sorrow that is not really true repentance; it is remorse, the sorrow of the world. Peter showed repentance; his was a godly sorrow that led him back to Christ. Judas showed remorse; his was a hopeless sorrow, a sorrow of the world, that led him away from Christ into suicide. Satan wants us to believe that we cannot be forgiven (see Zech. 3:1–5); yet read Rom. 8:31–39. If Satan can accuse us of sin and discourage us with our past failures, he will rob us of our joy and usefulness to Christ.

If God forgives a person of sin, we must forgive the person, too (Eph. 4:32).

## **III. Paul's Triumph in Christ (2:12–17)**

Paul picks up his account of the trip from Ephesus to Philippi. What had started out as trouble ended up as triumph! How often this happens in the Christian life. The women came to the tomb that Easter morning burdened with disappointment, only to find that a great victory had been won. Paul came to Troas and could not find Titus, but he did find a “tremendous opportunity” to preach the Gospel (Rom. 8:28). In every place of trial there is always an open door of opportunity. Joseph turned trials into triumph in Egypt; Daniel did in Babylon; Paul did at Troas.

But service is no substitute for peace, and Paul longed to see Titus and get word about the church at Corinth. He left Troas and made his way to Macedonia (probably Philippi), bypassing Corinth completely. At Philippi he met Titus and received the good news that the offender had been disciplined, the majority of the church was behind Paul, and things were looking better. This so rejoiced Paul that he broke into a song of praise.

The picture in vv. 14–17 was familiar to every Roman but is not to twentieth-century Christians. Whenever a victorious general returned home from battle, Rome gave him a public parade, not unlike our modern ticker-tape parades. This parade was filled with pomp and glory, and a great deal of incense was burned in honor of the hero. In the parade soldiers and officers would enjoy glory and praise, but slaves and captives also present would end up in the arena to die fighting the wild beasts. As the victors smelled the incense, they inhaled an aroma of life and joy; but to the captives, the incense was a reminder of their coming death.

In the “Christian parade” Paul describes, Jesus Christ is the Victor. Through His death on the cross, He has conquered every foe. We Christians ride in that procession with Him, sharing His victory (1 Cor. 15:57). The Christian, however, is the incense

(sweet savor of Christ) in this procession as the Spirit spreads the knowledge of Christ in and through our lives. This savor, or perfume, means life to other believers, but to the unbeliever headed for eternal condemnation, it means death. Joseph was a savor of death to the baker, but a savor of life to the butler (Gen. 40).

Paul's description is a beautiful and challenging picture. What a tremendous responsibility it is to introduce people to life, or to have them reject Christ and go off to death! Being a Christian is a serious responsibility, for our lives are leading people either to heaven or hell. No wonder Paul exclaims, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (v. 16). How can a Christian possess all he needs to be the best Christian possible, the best witness, the best soldier? Paul answers the question in 3:5—"Our sufficiency is of God." Paul uses this word "sufficient" several times in this letter. Christ is sufficient for our spiritual needs (3:4–6), our material needs (9:8), and our physical needs (12:7–10).

In v. 17, Paul returns to the accusation that his word could not be trusted. Unfortunately, there are, even today, religious leaders who "make merchandise" of (v. 17—corrupt) the Word of God, who are insincere and deceptive. The word "corrupt" has the idea of "peddling" the Gospel, using the ministry only as a means of making a living rather than building the church of Jesus Christ. A form of this Gk. word was used to describe an innkeeper or peddler, and carries the idea of doing any kind of business just to make a profit. Paul's ministry was not a business; it was a burden. He was not serving men; he was serving Christ. He was sincere in method, message, and motive. He realized that God's eye was upon him and that Christ's glory was at stake.

In these two chapters we have seen that Paul's ministry was full of suffering and sorrow, yet he experienced triumph and joy in Christ. Let us remember that "our sufficiency is of God" (v. 5).

## 2 Corinthians 3

This chapter is a key one, for it shows the relationship between the OT message of Law and the NT ministry of the Gospel of God's grace. It seems that the Jewish faction at Corinth was saying that Paul was not a true apostle because he did not have letters of commendation from the church at Jerusalem. Apparently some teachers had arrived at Corinth with such letters, and this lack of credentials seemed to discredit Paul. The apostle used this accusation as an opportunity to contrast the Gospel of grace with the Law of Moses.

### I. Written on Hearts, Not Stones (3:1–3)

"I don't need letters of recommendation!" says Paul. "You Christians at Corinth are my letters, written on hearts, not on stones!" "By their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:20, NKJV). A person's life and ministry may be seen in his or her work. Paul pictures himself as God's secretary, writing the Word into the lives of God's people. What an amazing truth: every Christian is an epistle of Christ being read by all men!

You are writing a Gospel, a chapter each day,  
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say.  
Men read what you write, whether faithful or true.  
Just what is the Gospel according to you?

Moses wrote God's Law on stones, but in this age, God writes His Word on our hearts (Heb. 10:16–17). The Law was an external matter; grace dwells internally, in the heart. But Paul did not write even with ink, for that would fade; he wrote permanently with the Spirit of God. The Law, written on stone, held in a man's hand, could never change his life. But the Spirit of God can use the Word to change lives and make them like Jesus. The NT ministry, then, is a spiritual ministry, as the Spirit writes the Word on men's hearts.

## **II. Bringing Life, Not Death (3:4–6)**

When Paul says, "The letter kills," he is not talking about the "letter" of God's Word as opposed to its "spirit." Often we hear confused people say, "It is wrong to follow the letter of the Bible; we must follow the spirit of it." Keep in mind that by "the letter," Paul means the OT law. In this chapter, He uses different phrases when referring to the OT law: the letter (v. 6); ministry of death (v. 7); ministry of condemnation (v. 9).

The Law was never given to impart life; it was definitely a ministry of death. Paul was a minister of the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant of works and death. No man was ever saved through the Law! Yet there were teachers at Corinth telling the people to obey the Law and reject Paul's Gospel of grace. Trace the word "life" in John's Gospel, for example, and you will see that the NT ministry is one of life through the Holy Spirit.

## **III. Lasting Glory, Not Fading Glory (3:7–13)**

Certainly there was glory to the OT ministry. Glory filled the temple; the glory of God hovered over the people in the wilderness. The temple and its ceremonies, and the very giving of the Law to Moses, all had glory attached to them. But it was a fading glory, not a lasting glory. Paul cites the experience of Moses from Ex. 34:29–35. Moses had been in God's presence, and His glory was reflected on his face. But Moses knew that this glory would fade, so he wore a veil over his face whenever talking to the people, lest they see the glory fade and lose confidence in his ministry. (It is commonly taught, but in error, that Moses wore the veil to avoid frightening the people. Note v. 13, "And not as Moses did, who put a veil over his face so no one could see the glory fade away" (TLB). God never meant for the glory of the Old Covenant to remain; it was to fade away before the abounding glory of the Gospel. If the ministry of condemnation (the Law) was glorious, then the ministry of righteousness (the Gospel) is even more glorious! Paul needs no veil; he has nothing to hide. The glory of the Gospel is there!

## **IV. Unveiled, Not Veiled (3:14–16)**

Paul makes a spiritual application of Moses' veil. He states that there is still a veil over the hearts of the Jews when they read the OT, and this veil keeps them from seeing

Christ. The OT will always be a locked book to the heart that knows not Christ. Jesus removed that veil when He rent the veil of the temple and fulfilled the OT types and prophecies. Yet Israel does not recognize that the ministry of the Law is temporary; it is holding on to a ministry that was never meant to last, a ministry with fading glory. There is a two-fold blindness upon Israel: a blindness that affects persons, in that they cannot recognize Christ as revealed in the OT, and a judicial blindness whereby God has blinded Israel as a nation (Rom 11:25). Satan blinds the minds of all sinners, hiding from them the glorious Gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).

But when the heart turns to Christ, that veil is taken away. Moses removed his veil when he went up to the mount to see God, and any Jew who turns honestly to the Lord will have his spiritual veil removed and will see Christ and receive Him as Savior. The NT ministry is one that points to Christ in the Word of God, in both the OT and the NT. We have nothing to hide, nothing to veil; the glory will last forever and will grow continually brighter.

## **V. Liberty, Not Bondage (3:17–18)**

Verse 17 is grossly misused and quoted to excuse all kinds of unspiritual practices. “The Lord is that Spirit”; when sinners turn to Christ, it is through the ministry of the Spirit. And the Spirit gives liberty from spiritual bondage. The Old Covenant was a covenant of works and bondage (Acts 15:10). But the New Covenant is a ministry of glorious liberty in Christ (Gal. 5:1ff). This liberty is not license; it is freedom from fear, sin, the world, and legalistic religious practices. Every Christian is like Moses: with an unveiled face, we can come into the presence of God and enjoy His glory—yes, receive that glory and become more like Christ!

In v. 18, Paul illustrates the meaning of sanctification and growing in grace. He compares the Word of God to a mirror (“glass”—James 1:23–25). When the people of God look into the Word of God and see the glory of God, the Spirit of God transforms them to be like the Son of God (Rom. 8:29). “Changed” in this verse is the same as the Gk. word for “transformed” in Rom. 12:2 and “transfigured” in Matt. 17:2, and explains how we have our minds renewed in Christ. The Christian is not in bondage and fear; we can go into the very presence of God and enjoy His glory and grace. We do not have to wait for Christ to return to become like Him; we can daily grow “from glory to glory” (v. 18).

Truly our position in Christ is a glorious one! The ministry of grace is far superior to Judaism or any other religion, even though the NT Christian has none of the ceremonies or visible trappings that belonged to the Law. Ours is a glorious ministry, and its glory will never fade.



## 2 Corinthians 4

Some at Corinth were accusing Paul of being insincere in his ministry. “Paul is in it for what he can get out of it!” was their accusation. In this chapter, Paul gives the evidence that proves his ministry is sincere.

### I. His Determination (4:1)

Why would Paul keep on preaching, with all the dangers and toils involved, if he were not sincere? A man with lesser motives, or a less spiritual view of the ministry, would have given up long ago. Paul looked upon his ministry as a stewardship: God gave it to him, and God also gave him strength to continue and not faint. The Gospel was too glorious for Paul to give up! It was too great a privilege for him to be a minister of the Gospel to risk falling by the wayside.

### II. His Honesty (4:2–4)

There are some things Paul refused to do. He refused to use underhanded, deceitful practices to gain followers. False teachers were doing these very things. “We do not try to trick people into believing,” is the way TLB puts it. Paul would not walk in craftiness or use the Word deceitfully, that is, “adulterating the Word of God.” We handle the Bible deceitfully by mixing philosophy and error with God’s truth in order to win human approval. Not so with Paul. His ministry was honest. He used the Word in an open, sincere way and encouraged people to search the Scriptures for themselves (see Acts 17:11).

If the Gospel is hidden, it should never be the fault of the teacher. Satan blinds the minds of sinners because he does not want them to see Christ’s glory. Multitudes who today refuse to look upon His face in salvation will some day try to hide from His face (Rev. 6:15–17). The sinner’s mind is blinded and ignorant (Eph. 4:17–19), and only the light of the Word can bring the knowledge of salvation. But we must never twist or corrupt the Word of God to attempt to win converts. We must handle the Word with a good conscience toward men and God.

### III. His Humility (4:5–7)

If Paul wanted to get a following for himself and make money, then he should have preached himself, not Christ. Yet he would not preach himself; he sought only to honor Christ. Read again 1 Cor. 3:1–9 to see how Paul presents himself as a servant of God and a slave for Jesus’ sake. No, there can be no light if we exalt men; God alone can cause the light to shine out of the darkness.

Here Paul refers us back to Gen. 1:1–5 where God brought light at creation and from this brought life and blessing. The lost sinner’s heart is like that original earth: formless and empty and dark. The Spirit broods over the heart. The Word comes and brings light—the light of the glorious Gospel. The sinner then becomes a new creation, and starts to bring forth fruit for the glory of God.

“Yes, I have a treasure,” Paul admits, “but it is in an earthen vessel. I don’t want to be seen; I’m just the vessel. The most important thing is that Christ is seen and that Christ gets the glory.” It is too bad when Christian workers make the vessel more important than the treasure of the Gospel.

#### **IV. His Suffering (4:8–10)**

If Paul were out for personal gain, as they said, then why did he suffer so much? The man who compromises the Word of God will not suffer; men will welcome him and honor him. But people were abusing Paul, rejecting him, and making life difficult for him. They were treating him the way men treated Christ.

Paul’s willingness to suffer for Christ is one of the greatest proofs of his sincerity as a servant of God. Read these verses in a modern translation to get the vigor of their message.

#### **V. His Unselfishness (4:11–15)**

Paul was willing to face suffering and death for Jesus’ sake and for the sake of the churches. The experiences that brought death to him meant life for the believers as he suffered to bring the Word to them. The false teachers knew nothing of suffering or sacrifice. All through this letter, Paul points to his scars as the credentials of his ministry. In Gal. 6:17 he said, “I bear in my body the marks [brands] of the Lord Jesus!”

“All things are for your sakes!” What an unselfish spirit! Paul was willing to go anywhere, willing to endure anything, if it brought glory to God and good to the churches. He had the Spirit of faith; he knew that his sufferings would mean blessings.

#### **VI. His Faith (4:16–18)**

These verses bring wonderful assurance to the believer in times of suffering. Though the outward man is perishing day by day, the inward man, the spiritual man, is being renewed day by day (see 3:18). Paul is here weighing his sufferings on God’s scales. He discovers that his sufferings are light when compared to the weight of glory God has stored up for him. His days and years of trial are nothing compared to the eternity of bliss that awaits him. How important it is for us to live “with eternity’s values in view.” Life takes on new meaning when we see things through God’s eyes.

Verse 18 is a paradox to the unbeliever, but a precious truth to the Christian. We live by faith, not by sight. It is faith that enables the Christian to see things that cannot be seen (Heb. 11:1–3); this faith comes from the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). The things that the world lives and dies for are temporal, passing; the things of the Lord last forever. The world thinks we are crazy because we dare to believe God’s Word and live according to His will. We pass up the “things” that men covet because our hearts are set on higher values.

It is important that we have a sincere Christian life and ministry. Our motives must be pure. Our methods must be scriptural. We must be true to the Word of God. Paul had this kind of a ministry, and so should we.

## 2 Corinthians 5

In this chapter, Paul is still discussing his ministry, answering the accusations of his enemies. He points out that his ministry is serious, not careless; that he works from honest motives and not fleshly desires. Paul explains four motives that control his life and his ministry.

### I. His Confidence of Heaven (5:1–8)

In the previous chapter, Paul mentioned his determination to serve Christ in spite of suffering and even death. He lived by faith, not by sight. But this faith was not blind trust; it was a certain confidence in the Word of God. When you know where you are going, no storm can frighten you or enemy defeat you. The outward man might be perishing (4:16), but what difference did that make? Paul knew that glory lay on the other side.

The “building” Paul is talking about here is not the home Christ is preparing for believers (John 14:1ff); it is the glorified body that will be ours when Christ returns (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:50ff.). Our earthly house is but a tent (tabernacle) that will one day be taken down (dissolved). But God has a glorified body for us! However, our desire as Christians is not to have this earthly body taken down in death, but to have it “clothed upon” and transformed when Jesus comes. How do we know we have this glorious future? We have the earnest of the Spirit (v. 5), that “eternal down payment” that assures us the rest of the promised blessing will be ours. We are today “at home in the body but absent from the Lord.” Our yearning is to be “at home with the Lord” and living in glorified bodies that will never change. See Phil. 1:19–24.

### II. His Concern to Please Christ (5:9–13)

But Paul is not selfish; his Christian service is motivated by more than a hope for the future. He seeks to please Christ and be acceptable to Him right now. Paul wanted to be found “well-pleasing” to Christ (v. 9). He had a healthy fear of the Lord (“terror” in v. 11), for he knew that all believers will one day be judged at Christ’s Judgment Seat (see 1 Cor. 3:10–15; Rom. 14:7–13). Knowing that his works would some day be revealed and tested, Paul wanted to live the kind of life that pleased and honored Christ.

The Gk. word for “appear” in v. 10 means more than “stand” or “show up.” It carries the idea of being revealed; “for we shall all be shown as we are” is the meaning. There will be no pretending at that judgment; our character and works will be revealed as they are, and the suitable rewards will be given. But the true servant of God is careful even today to have an open life, manifest both to God and men (v. 11). How important it is that we let God do the judging, for He sees the heart. The Corinthians were “glorying in appearance” (v. 12) as they boasted about various preachers and criticized Paul. Keep in mind that “results” are not the only test of a worker’s life and service. The motives of the heart are very important.

### III. His Constraint of Love (5:14–17)

Paul had been accused of being mad (see Acts 26:24) since he went to such extremes to win men to Christ. But the controlling power of his life was the love of Christ. This does not mean Paul's love for Christ, although certainly that was there. It means rather the love Christ had for Paul. The apostle was so overwhelmed by Jesus' love for him that to serve and honor Christ became the controlling motive of his life. He describes in vv. 14–17 this love that led Christ to the cross to die for sinners. Why did He die? That we might live *through* Him (1 John 4:9); that we might live *with* Him (1 Thes. 5:10); and that we might live *for* Him (2 Cor. 5:15). There can be no selfishness in the heart of the Christian who understands the love of Christ.

One of the problems at Corinth was that believers were judging after the flesh (1 Cor. 4:1–7). They were comparing Paul with other teachers and using carnal judgment instead of spiritual discernment. They were forgetting that the Christian life is a new creation with new values and motives. To judge Christ after the flesh is wrong; that is, to look upon Him (as the world does) as only a great teacher or example. Paul, as an unconverted Jewish rabbi, probably did look upon Christ after the flesh. But when he saw the glorified Christ, Paul changed his point of view. We must have a spiritual evaluation based on the Word of God. Other teachers said Paul was beside himself; they were judging after the flesh and proving that they lacked that love of Christ as the controlling force of their lives.

### IV. His Commission from God (5:18–21)

We have seen three motives that controlled Paul's life and ministry: his confidence of heaven, his concern to please Christ, and his constraint of love. There was a fourth motive: Paul's commission from God. Paul was an ambassador for Christ! His message was one of peace: God had paid the price for sin; God was not at war with sinners; sinners could now believe and be saved. What a tremendous message! Consider some facts about ambassadors.

(1) Ambassadors are chosen, and Christ had chosen Paul to be His representative. Paul did not represent himself (see 4:5) but Christ. His message was the Gospel Christ had committed to his trust (1 Thes. 2:4). His aim was to please Christ and be faithful to the task given to him.

(2) Ambassadors are protected. An ambassador must be a citizen of the nation that he represents, and Paul (as is every Christian) was a citizen of heaven (see Phil. 3:20 where "conversation" is equated with "citizenship.") The nation supplies their ambassadors' every need and stands ready to protect them. Likewise Christ supplied Paul's every need and stood with him in every crisis.

(3) Ambassadors are held accountable. Ambassadors represent their countries and say what they are instructed to say. They know that they must one day give an account of their work.

(4) Ambassadors are called home before war is declared. God has not yet declared war on this wicked world, but one day He will. There is a coming day of wrath (1 Thes. 1:10) that will judge the wicked, but Christians will be called home before that day

comes (1 Thes. 5:1–10). The church, God’s ambassadors, will not go through the Tribulation.

The message of the church today is one of reconciliation: God in Christ on the cross has reconciled the world to himself and is willing to save all who will trust His Son. Ours is not a message of social reform (although the Gospel reforms lives, Titus 2:11–15); ours is a message of spiritual regeneration. We represent Christ as we invite the lost to receive Him. What a privilege—what a responsibility!

All believers are ambassadors, whether we accept the commission or not. “As the Father has sent me, also I send you,” said Christ (John 20:21, NKJV). Let us make sure that our message, methods, and motives are right, so that our work might be lasting and might stand the test of fire when we stand before Him.

## 2 Corinthians 6

Chapters 6–9 are composed of a series of loving exhortations to the Christians at Corinth. In 6:1–13, Paul exhorts them to examine his life and ministry and to enlarge their hearts to make room for him. Second Corinthians 6:14–7:1 (the chapter division here is unfortunate) is a call to separation, while in 7:2–16 is a plea for reconciliation. Chapters 8–9 deal with the offering Paul was taking for the poor saints of Judea, and he appeals for the Corinthians’ cooperation. We note, then, two appeals here in chapter 6.

### I. An Appeal for Examination (6:1–13)

Paul has been defending his life and ministry in the first five chapters. His enemies at Corinth had accused him of wrong methods and motives, and he successfully answered them. His final statement in chapter 5 deals with his ministry of reconciliation, so it is just one step forward for him to appeal to the Corinthians to be reconciled to him and to receive God’s grace. He not only beseeches the sinners in 5:20, but he beseeches the saints in 6:1. How tragic it is when churches and Christians receive God’s grace in vain. The Corinthians were babes in Christ, immature saints, because they failed to grow in grace and knowledge. They had the greatest pastor available—Paul—and yet they failed to benefit from his ministry!

Paul had been careful to do nothing that would make others stumble or would in any way discredit the ministry. In vv. 3–10, Paul gives several arguments to prove that his ministry was blameless.

#### A. *The battles he waged (vv. 3–5).*

“Patience” here means “endurance.” It is not a picture of the Christian in a rocking chair, doing nothing, but rather of the soldier in battle, pressing on to victory in spite of opposition. The battles Paul fought in obedience to Christ were proof of his sincere, unselfish ministry. This distress came, not because he was disobedient and needed chastening, but because he was obedient and a threat to Satan. Stripes refer to the beatings Paul endured; tumults, the mobs he faced; “labors” reminds us of his toil day and night to support himself and his companions; “watchings” describes his sleepless

nights of prayer and ministry of the Word; “fastings” indicates that he often went without food. No counterfeit minister would have endured so much!

*B. The weapons he used (vv. 6–7).*

Paul’s character and conduct were always Christ-like. He had clean hands and a clean conscience, and his love for the saints was honest, not “put on.” He used the Word of God and prayer as weapons to defeat Satan. Dishonest ministers would have used carnal methods to promote their work.

*C. The reputation he gained (vv. 8–10).*

We have here a series of paradoxes, or seemingly contradictory statements. Certainly the Christian servant is looked upon differently by the saints and the sinners. The sinners see him in one light, the saints in another, just as men look at Jesus with differing opinions. What a thrilling description is v. 10 of the Christian who is sold out to Christ!

Paul closed this appeal by reminding them of his love. His heart was wide open with love, but their hearts had been narrowed (straitened). He appealed to them as his children to receive him.

## **II. An Appeal for Separation (6:13–7:1)**

The problems in the Corinthian church were spiritual: the members were living like worldly people and not like Christians. There was compromise with sin. Paul presents two major arguments for separation from the world.

*A. The argument from principle (vv. 13–16).*

It is a basic principle of life that opposites cannot fellowship together. The “unequal yoke” takes us back to Moses’ admonition in Lev. 19:19. These Corinthians were yoking themselves with unbelievers in marriage, business life, and other ways, and were losing their testimonies for Christ. After all, if Christians live like the world, how can they witness to the world?

Note the series of contrasts here: righteousness/unrighteousness; light/darkness; Christ/Belial (an OT name for Satan); believer/unbeliever (infidel); temple of God/idols. The attitude of too many Christians today is that the church should court and please the world in order to try to win it. Nothing could be further from the truth! There must be separation from sin. This does not mean isolation, retreating from the world; it does mean keeping ourselves from the defilement of the world. It is fine for the ship to be in the water, but when water gets into the ship, look out! Paul cites Lev. 26:11–12 to show that God lives and walks in the believer, so that his relationship to the world affects his fellowship with God.

*B. The argument from promise (vv. 17–18).*

God promises to bless those who keep themselves pure. Worldliness is subtle; it creeps in gradually. This downhill progression begins in friendship with the world (James 4:4); then love for the world (1 John 2:15–17); then conformity to the world (Rom. 12:1–2). But God promises to bless those who will separate themselves unto Him (Isa. 52:11).

The compromising Christian loses the enjoyment of God's love and a deeper fellowship in the Spirit.

Chapter 7 begins with the verse that should end chapter 6. This verse summarizes in a compact way what Paul has to say about personal holiness.

(1) Two motives for separation from the world: love for God ("dearly beloved") and the fear of God. Both conditions must operate in our lives. Just as the loving wife keeps herself pure because she loves her husband, so the Christian keeps his life clean because he loves Christ. But also necessary is that healthy fear of God, lest He should have to discipline us to teach us obedience.

(2) Two responsibilities: we must cleanse ourselves (this is negative) and perfect holiness (this is positive). It is good to ask God to cleanse us (Ps. 51:2, 7), and His promise in 1 John 1:9 affords full cleansing. But we must also cleanse ourselves by putting out of our lives all that displeases Him. "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean!" says Isa. 1:16, (NKJV). We should not expect God to remove things that we ourselves must deal with. "If your hand makes you sin, cut it off!" (cf. Matt. 6:30) Then we can grow in holiness through the Spirit.

(3) Two kinds of sin: filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. There are sins of action as well as of attitude. The prodigal son was guilty of sins of the flesh, but his elder brother committed sins of the spirit. See Ps. 51:17.

Separation is the negative; perfecting holiness is the positive. How sad it is to see churches and Christians who are separated from sin, but who have never grown in personal holiness and developed the fruits of the Spirit. The Pharisees were separated from sin, but there was an absence of love and true obedience.

## 2 Corinthians 7

In 1:12–13, Paul began to tell the Corinthians of his experience with Titus in Macedonia, and in this chapter he completes the account. Just as the word "comfort" appeared often in chapters 1–2, so it reappears here (vv. 4–7, 13). The appeal in this chapter is for the Corinthians to be reconciled to Paul. They had been critical and disobedient, but now it was time to receive him and fellowship with him again, particularly in light of his coming visit. In the early part of his letter, Paul told of the trials he went through when he left Ephesus, waited for Titus, and worried about the situation at Corinth. Now he explains how God comforted him and gave him joy. Three comforts are mentioned.

### I. The Comfort of the Arrival of Titus (7:1–6)

"Receive us" literally means "Make room for us in your hearts" (note 6:11–12). Paul again reminds them of his clean life and honest ministry; he hastens to assure them that his writing in this way was not to condemn them. How could he condemn those who were in his heart and such a vital part of his life? It is assuring to us today to see that Paul knew the meaning of distress and disappointment (v. 5). Where was Titus? What

was the situation like in Corinth? Would the church last at Ephesus? All these questions and many more crowded into Paul's mind as he traveled to Macedonia.

But the arrival of Titus was a source of great comfort to Paul. He admits he was "cast down" (downcast—v. 6), but that the arrival of his friend brought him great relief. This is the way Christians ought to help one another. We ought to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2); encourage one another (Heb. 10:25); minister to one another (1 Peter 4:10–11). Christ sent the disciples out two by two, knowing that "it is not good for a man to be alone" (cf. Gen 2:18) even in Christian service. Lonely Christians are often defeated Christians. Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 states that "two are better than one." What a privilege and responsibility it is for Christians to encourage one another! When Elijah thought he was the only one faithful to God, he began to backslide. Jonah ministered alone and developed a bitter spirit.

## **II. The Comfort of the Corinthians' Obedience (7:7–12)**

"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country" (Prov. 25:25). It was a comfort to see Titus again (see Acts 28:15), but an even greater comfort to hear the good news that Paul's stern letter had brought results. Verse 7 lists the results: they had an earnest desire to see Paul again; they had mourned over their sin; they had rekindled their love for Paul; they had repented and dealt with the offender (v. 8). Read 1 Cor. 5 for Paul's commands for disciplining the fornicator in the church. In v. 11, Paul indicated several of their other reactions: they were full of care, or concern, to obey Paul; they sought to clear themselves with men and God; they showed indignation at the sin, instead of being puffed up (see 1 Cor. 5:2); they feared lest God would deal with them; and they sought to obey God with strong determination. "Revenge" in v. 11 does not carry with it any idea of personal vindictiveness. It indicates that the offender was punished adequately.

Paul teaches here the important doctrine of repentance. He states that there is a vast difference between repentance and regret. Repentance is from God and is a sorrow that draws people closer to God and brings them to a place of confessing and forsaking sin. Regret is from the world; it drives people away from God and into the hand of Satan. For example, Peter showed repentance and was forgiven; Judas showed regret and took his own life. Godly sorrow is good; it leads to life. But the sorrow of the world leads to death. Some people commit suicide because they know nothing of true repentance and the gracious forgiveness that God shares with those who call upon Him in faith.

In v. 12, Paul indicates that he had written that stern letter (about which even he had been temporarily sorry, v. 8) to prove his love for them. It was not simply to correct the offender, or to protect the one against whom this man had sinned, but to prove Paul's care and concern for them. Spiritual workers who shun correction and avoid facing facts do not sincerely love their people or their Lord. Paul was anxious that the believers there suffer no loss spiritually (damage, v. 9); his sharp rebuke was from a heart of love, for their good and God's glory.



### III. The Comfort of Their Reception of Titus (7:13–16)

Titus was overjoyed when he met Paul, and this joy was due to the warm reception he had received at Corinth. The church had not been so gracious to Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17), otherwise Titus would never have been sent. Note 1 Cor. 16:10–11.

Paul had boasted to Titus about the Corinthian church, and now his “godly boasting” had proved true. How thrilled Paul was at the love the Corinthians had shown to his co-worker. To receive Titus so warmly, Paul believed, was the same as receiving him. Paul knew that his next visit to Corinth would be an enjoyable one.

The Corinthians had received Titus with “fear and trembling.” This is because they had received God’s Word from Paul and were willing to obey it. God wants us to tremble at His Word (Isa. 66:2). Oddly enough, Paul’s first ministry at Corinth was one performed in fear and trembling (1 Cor. 2:3). They respected Titus as God’s servant and received his leadership as from the Lord (see 1 Thes. 2:13 and 5:12–15). “Obey them that have the [spiritual] rule over you,” is the command of Heb. 13:17. The way we treat God’s faithful servants is the way we treat Christ, for His servants represent Him (2 Cor. 5:20; John 13:20).

It is interesting to read through the Bible and note that God’s servants rejoice when God’s people are obedient and are burdened when God’s people disobey. Moses often felt like giving up because the people were rebellious. Jeremiah wept bitterly over the hardness of Israel. Jesus Himself wept because the Jews were ignorant of the day of their visitation. Paul’s ministry was one of tears (Acts 20:19, 31). God’s servants are human; they have the treasure “in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7) and know the disappointments and discouragements that life can bring. How important it is for us to “remember them which have the rule over you” (Heb. 13:7), “obey them that have the rule over you” (Heb. 13:17), and “salute [i.e., greet in love] all them that have the rule over you” (Heb. 13:24).

Having now replied to his critics and defended his ministry, and having been assured of the love of the church, Paul moves to a plea for the missionary offering for the poor saints of Judea. It is dangerous to take offerings from Christians who are not right spiritually. We do them harm, and we do the cause of Christ harm. Paul dealt first with the Corinthians’ spiritual needs, and then he reminded them of their promise to help in the missionary relief collection.

## 2 Corinthians 8

Chapters 8 and 9 deal with the missionary offering Paul was receiving for the believers in Judea (1 Cor. 16:1–3 and Romans 15:25–28). In the early days of the church (Acts 2–10), these Jewish believers had given up everything and had “all things common” (Acts 4:32–37). It was a foretaste of the kingdom God promised to Israel. But when Israel was set aside and the church brought onto the scene, this “Christian communism” died away, leaving these saints in great need. It was to them Paul was taking this offering. While these chapters focus primarily on a special missionary relief offering, they help us grasp some of the principles and promises of Christian giving.

## **I. Gifts Should Be Brought to the Church (8:1)**

In chapter 8 are the same directions Paul gave in 1 Cor. 16:2, but they had not yet been obeyed. On the first day of the week (the Lord's Day), the believers (the Lord's people) were to bring their offerings (the Lord's tithes and offerings) to the church meeting (the Lord's house). The believer's first responsibility is to his own local church. Furthermore, since this offering was to be a witness to the Jews from the Gentile churches, it was important that each congregation be represented.

Spiritual giving is biblical giving. If Christians do not bring tithes and offerings to the local church, then their hearts are not in the ministry of the local church (Matt. 6:21). Individual giving other than to the local church is certainly allowed, for Paul received help from many individuals (2 Tim. 1:16–18, and see the many names in Romans 16); but our first obligation is to the church where we fellowship and serve.

## **II. Gifts Should Come from the Heart (8:2–9)**

Christian giving does not depend on material circumstances so much as spiritual convictions. The believers in Macedonia (v. 1) were poor and going through suffering; yet because they loved Christ, they wanted to share in the offering. They did not say, "We must keep this for ourselves!" They were willing to give that others might be helped. They looked upon their giving as a grace (note vv. 1, 6, 7, 9, 19, and 9:8). Christian giving flows from the heart, the spontaneous expression of love to Christ for His full and free salvation.

The Corinthians were enriched with many spiritual blessings (v. 7), and Paul urged them to have also the grace of giving. For us to profess to be spiritual, and yet not give faithfully to the Lord, is to deny what we profess. Faith, preaching, witnessing, studying the Bible—none of these is a substitute for the grace of giving.

Paul uses not only the example of the Macedonian churches, but also the example of Christ Himself. How rich He was—and how poor He became! Read Phil. 2 for the details. To give is to be Christ-like, for His whole life was spent in giving.

## **III. Gifts Should Be Measured Proportionately (8:10–15)**

A year before, the Corinthian church had suggested the offering and announced its willingness to share in it. Titus had assisted in the beginning of the project (v. 6), and now Paul was exhorting them to finish what they had started. How easy it is to make promises and then fail to keep them! If they had fulfilled their other financial obligations in the same manner, they might have been thrown in jail!

Paul then laid down in v. 12 the principle of proportionate giving, as he did in 1 Cor. 16:2 ("as he may prosper, NKJV"). Tithing is the only fair way to give. Tithing robs no man; it is fair to rich and poor alike. It permits all men to give and receive God's blessing. It is not the *portion* but the *proportion* that God seeks. This is the only way there could be any "equality" (v. 14) in the project. Paul cites Ex. 16:18 to show that just as God blessed the Jews as they obeyed Him, so He will bless Christians who obey His Word concerning giving. God does not send more blessings on the person who gives 10 percent of \$500 than He does on the person who gives 10 percent of \$100, if this is

what they have to give. The person who opposes tithing is opposing the only fair way of giving.

#### **IV. Gifts Should Be Handled Honestly (8:16–24)**

Paul was anxious that nobody accuse him of misusing these missionary funds, so he had the churches appoint three messengers to handle the money. They were Titus (vv. 16–17), another brother (vv. 18–19), and a third associate (v. 22). This is a good business practice. It is sad to see churches and Christian organizations handle funds in an unbusinesslike manner. All money should be receipted and recorded. Funds should be counted by more than one person. Many a Christian worker has lost his power and testimony because of a misuse of funds or because of carelessness in handling the Lord's money.

Verses 20–21 are the key: there should be no opportunity for accusation, either from God or men. It isn't enough for the Christian worker to say "God knows my heart." We must remember that others are watching us, and we dare not give the enemy any opportunity to accuse us of dishonesty.

No Christian or local church should send money to works that are not financially sound. The fact that "there is a need" is not reason enough for giving; there must be proof that the money is handled honestly and spent wisely. We are not obligated to pay a debt we never incurred.

## **2 Corinthians 9**

Having discussed in chapter 8 the principles of Christian giving, Paul now shares the promises that we can claim if we are faithful in our giving to God. These two chapters present giving as a Christian grace, a blessing, not as a legal obligation that burdens people. If giving is difficult for a Christian, then there is something wrong with his heart! Note the three-fold promise that Paul gives:

#### **I. Giving Will Bring Blessing to Others (9:1–5)**

In 8:1–5, Paul used the churches of Macedonia as examples to encourage the Corinthians, and now he uses the Corinthians as an encouragement to the churches of Macedonia! Christians ought to be an encouragement to one another. Paul had been "boasting" to others of the generosity of the church at Corinth (8:24), and now he wants to make sure that the Corinthians do not embarrass him. He knew they had readiness of mind and were willing and anxious to share in the missionary offering, but he wanted to remind them just the same.

"Your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action" (v. 2, NIV) What a testimony! Unfortunately, some Christians provoke people in the wrong way. Hebrews 10:24 urges us to provoke one another to good works, and this is what the Corinthians were doing. A year before, they had urged Paul to take up this missionary offering and had pledged

their support. The apostle had used their zeal as an encouragement to the other churches, and now he reminds them of their promise. He seems to be saying, “If you fail to do your share, you will discourage other Christians and hurt the whole offering.”

Paul called this offering “a bounty,” that is, a blessing. He wanted them to look upon it as an opportunity to be a blessing and get a blessing, and not as a yoke on their necks. How often people misunderstand the true blessing of giving! Giving is a blessing to others, both to those who receive (v. 12—it supplied their want) and to those who share. When a Christian is faithful in giving, he or she is being a blessing to others and encouraging other Christians to be obedient to the Word.

## **II. Giving Will Bring Blessing to Ourselves (9:6–11)**

Paul uses an agricultural principle here to illustrate his point. The farmer that sows bountifully will reap bountifully. See Prov. 11:24; Luke 6:38; and Gal. 6:7–8. “Bountifully” here is the same word as “bounty” in v. 5. To sow bountifully means to “sow with blessing” and to reap bountifully means to “reap with blessing.” God will be no man’s debtor; He is faithful to bless when we are faithful to obey.

Verse 7 is often misapplied. Paul is not talking here about how much we give so much as how we give. He told them how much to give in 8:12–15; it was to be in proportion to what they had. But for a believer to give grudgingly, or out of a sense of obligation, is to miss the blessing of giving. Giving must be from the heart, and God loves a cheerful (“hilarious” in the Gk.) giver. Some Christians take this verse to mean that it matters not how much we give, so long as we give cheerfully what we have purposed in our hearts. Absolutely not! A cheerful heart is not a substitute for an obedient heart. Our hearts should be both faithful and cheerful, because we give the right gift with the right motive.

Note the “alls” in v. 8—all grace; always; all sufficiency; all things; every good work. Nothing is left out! This is God’s promise to those who obey Him. This word “sufficiency” is found again in 3:5 and 12:9. God is faithful to supply what we need spiritually (2:6), materially (9:8), and physically (12:9). But God meets our needs, not simply for our own enjoyment, but that we might be able to serve Him and help others. We are to abound “to every good work” (v. 8). Paul exhorts Christians to go to work that they might be able to help others (Eph. 4:28). Here he refers to Ps. 112:9 and Isa. 55:10 to prove that God blesses the person who is faithful in giving. God supplies seed so that sowers might make bread for food and also have more seed for sowing.

Humanly speaking, the person who gives should be the person who loses; but such is not the case. “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). “Give and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38). This does not mean that we should bargain with God or look at our giving as a means of purchasing God’s blessing. No! Rather, we should look upon giving as an opportunity to show our love for God and our trust in His Word. Christian industrialist R. G. LeTourneau used to say, “If you give because it pays, it won’t pay!”

### **III. Giving Will Bring Glory to God (9:12–15)**

How many times Paul reminds the Corinthians of their spiritual riches in Christ (see 1 Cor. 1:5 and 4:8; 2 Cor. 8:9 and 9:11). God enriches us, we enrich others, and God receives the thanksgiving and glory! Paul points out that the distributing of this offering would not only bring help to the saints, but it would bring glory to God.

Verse 13 gives two reasons why the Jews receiving this offering would glorify God: (1) because the givers showed obedience to God's Word and (2) because this liberal offering helped them and all men. The recipients in turn would pray for the churches and love them the more.

There was, of course, a very practical thought behind this offering. Paul was anxious to bind the Gentile churches he had founded to the hearts of the Jewish Christians in Judea. This offering would prove that Paul was not an enemy of the Jews, and that there was a unity in the church regardless of racial, national, or ethnic distinctions.

Paul closes the chapter with a word of praise. He has been writing about giving, and his heart has been so filled with God's goodness to him that he shouts, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!" This gift is, of course, the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, and His gift of eternal life.

One cannot read these two chapters without gaining a new attitude toward giving. In the Christian life, there is no such thing as "material" and "spiritual." All that we have comes from God, and all that we have must be used for spiritual ends. Paul teaches that giving is not a burden but a blessing. He shows us that true Christian giving enriches the life and opens the fountains of God's blessings. Giving is a grace (8:1, 6–7, 9, 19; 9:8 and 14), and the Christian who understands something of grace will understand how to give.

## **2 Corinthians 10**

This last section of 2 Corinthians (chaps. 10–13) presents Paul's vindication of his apostleship. In these chapters he answers the accusations of his enemies at Corinth. As we read his reply, we can discover the lies they were telling about Paul: that he was not a true apostle since he lacked credentials from the Jerusalem church; that his motives were insincere; that his physical presence was so weak that he deserved no respect; that his letters were bold but he would never back them up in person; and that his promises could not be depended upon.

Keep in mind that Paul was not defending himself in these chapters; he was defending his apostolic office and, therefore, the message he preached. These lies were being furthered by the false teachers who had visited Corinth and won over part of the church to their false doctrine, which was a mixture of Judaism and the Gospel. Paul was not merely answering critics; he was answering Satan himself (11:13–15). When Paul speaks of "boasting," it is with a touch of sarcasm. "Your favorite teachers like to boast," he said, "so I will try to win your love by doing some boasting of my own!" Of course, Paul's boasting was in the Lord and not in himself. Here in chapter 10, Paul

gives several answers to the accusation that his presence was weak while his letters were powerful.

### **I. I Follow Christ's Example (10:1)**

The Corinthians loved to glory in men (1 Cor. 3:21 and 4:6–7) and were “swept off their feet” by the Judaizing preachers from Palestine. Even though they were preaching a false doctrine (11:4) and taking advantage of the Christians (11:18–20), they were welcomed by the church and honored above Paul, who had founded the church and risked his life for it. “Paul is so weak!” these teachers said, as they lorded it over the church. “Follow us, because we display real power!”

“If I am weak,” Paul replied, “it is not weakness—it is the meekness of Christ” (see v. 1). Christ never “lorded it over” people; His power was exercised in meekness and humility. Meekness is not weakness; meekness is power under control, the ability to be angry at sin, yet willing to suffer abuse for the sake of Christ. Let's not make the mistake of judging after the outward appearance (10:7) and thinking that some “powerhouse preacher” is necessarily displaying the power of God.

### **II. I Use Spiritual Weapons (10:2–6)**

Simply because Paul did not use carnal methods and exert the power of a “strong personality,” the believers thought he was a weakling! His weapons were spiritual, not fleshly. Like all of us, Paul “walked in the flesh” (that is, had all the weaknesses of the body), but he did not war after the flesh by depending on fleshly wisdom, human abilities, or physical prowess. Moses had to learn that God's weapons are spiritual (Acts 7:20–36) and Paul taught this principle in Eph. 6:10ff. The Word of God and prayer are the only effective weapons in this battle against Satan (Acts 6:4).

There was disobedience in Corinth because Christians were believing lies instead of the truth of God's Word. Paul warned them that he would smash their arguments and false doctrines and bring their hearts and minds to the place of obedience. Church problems are not solved simply by changing the constitution, revising the church program, or reorganizing a board, but by confronting people and problems with the Word of God.

### **III. I Don't Judge by Appearance (10:7–11)**

The person who judges by appearance always lives to give a good appearance. Paul lived to please God and never tried to be a man-pleaser. He was confident of his calling and credentials from the Lord, and that was all that mattered. Certainly he could have pulled rank and invoked his apostolic authority, but he preferred to use that authority to build up the church, not to tear it down. Of course, often it is necessary to tear down before we can make room for real building (Jer. 1:10).

How foolish of these Christians to discredit Paul because he lacked the physical stamina of Peter or the oratorical power of an Apollos! Carnal Christians are “preacher judges” and like to compare one servant of God with another. Paul warns them that his presence at his next visit would be just as powerful as his letters!

#### **IV. I Let God Do the Commending (10:12–18)**

These false teachers were members of a “mutual admiration society,” comparing themselves with one another; consequently they thought very highly of themselves. (See what Jesus says about this in Matt. 5:43–48. Also see Gal. 6:3–4.) But, says Paul, where were these “great teachers” when I risked my life to start the church in Corinth? Anybody can come along after the hard work is done, criticize the founder, and take all the glory! Paul had stretched himself out to reach the people in Corinth with the Gospel, and he was hoping to get their assistance in taking the Gospel “to the regions beyond.” The Judaizers had come along and were boasting in a work that they had never accomplished. Paul’s policy was to take the Gospel where nobody else had ever gone (see Rom. 15:20), while the Judaizers’ policy was to invade another man’s territory and take over the work he had done.

Paul was wise enough to leave the matter of commendations to the Lord alone. He refers to Jer. 9:24 in v. 17 (a thought he also quoted in 1 Cor. 1:31). After all, it is the Lord who gives the grace that we might serve Him, and He alone knows our hearts and motives. The apostle was willing to wait for God’s “Well done!” and we should be also.

As you review this chapter, you will note several important lessons all of us should learn for being effective workers in the service of Christ.

(1) Don’t be influenced by physical matters. The greatest servants of God are not always the most handsome or the strongest, humanly speaking. How easily some Christians are awed by a “Hollywood-style” Christian worker who sweeps them off their feet with imposing looks or hypnotic oratory. This does not mean, of course, that we should deliberately strive for a careless appearance or practice a mock humility. God has made each of us differently, and we must use all that He gives us for His glory.

(2) The most lasting work is done when we use spiritual weapons and tools. It is one thing to build a crowd, and something else to build a church. Theatrical programs, Madison Avenue promotional schemes, man-honoring displays that depend on the efforts of the flesh—all of these may grab popular attention, but they will never receive the approval of God. We build through prayer and the Word of God, and this takes time, dedication, and sacrifice.

(3) Don’t judge before the time (1 Cor. 4:5). Let God do the commending. Live for His approval, and your life and ministry will be blessed. You may seem to be a failure in your eyes and the eyes of others, but God may see you and your work as a great success for His glory.

## **2 Corinthians 11**

This chapter presents what Paul calls his “boasting.” Keep in mind that there is “holy irony” in this chapter as Paul turns his enemies’ accusations on themselves. “Since your new teachers love to boast,” Paul says, “then I will use their approved method and do some boasting, too!” He admits that he is not following Christ’s example in this action (11:17), but he knows his “boasting” will glorify Christ because all that he has endured has been for Christ’s glory. Paul boasts over three matters.

## **I. His Jealousy over the Church (11:1–6)**

There is a difference between jealousy and envy. Envy is of the flesh and is selfish; jealousy is based on love and seeks the welfare of others. It is right for a husband to be jealous over his wife or for a pastor to be jealous over his church. Paul compares the local church to a bride, just as in Eph. 5:22–33 he compared the church universal to Christ's bride. Both examples are valid. Just as Israel in the OT is compared to the wife of Jehovah ("wife" because already married to Him at Sinai), so the church is called the bride of Christ ("bride" because not yet wedded to Him). Paul's desire was to keep the church pure, free from false doctrine and worldly living. In the OT, going after false gods is compared to adultery; in the NT, worldliness is called adultery (James 4:1–4).

How can a local church be seduced from Christ? By following Satan's false teachers (vv. 3, 13–15). Just as Satan deceived Eve's mind in Gen. 3, so false teachers deceive the minds of believers and lead them away from the truth. "Simplicity" (v. 3) means single-hearted devotion. We cannot serve God and mammon. How important it is for the church to stay true to the Word of God! Religious leaders today try to give us another Jesus, and not the Christ Paul preached; or another Spirit, and not the Holy Spirit of God; or another Gospel, and not the Gospel of God's grace (see Gal. 1). The only defense against spiritual adultery is faithfulness to the Word of God. How jealous we should be over the church for which Christ died!

## **II. His Generosity to the Church (11:7–21)**

"Paul cannot be a true apostle," said his enemies, "otherwise he would accept money for his services. The fact that he refused to accept support from the church in Corinth is proof he knows he is not an honest man." How tragic when a good man's generosity is judged and his motives questioned! Paul uses a bit of irony here when he suggests that he committed a sin by refusing the Corinthians' material support (v. 7)! He had supported himself that the ministry might not be accused (1 Cor. 9 deals with this), and still his enemies found fault!

He assures them that it was because he loved them that he refused their support. He allowed the church at Philippi to send him support, but he did not take support from the people at Corinth, though his apostolic calling would have permitted it. He wanted to "cut off" any opportunity his enemies would have for accusing him (v. 12).

For the first time, Paul openly accuses these teachers of being servants of the devil. Satan's most effective weapon is imitation (see Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). Yet the Christians should have known that these teachers were from Satan, since their lives and ministries manifested nothing of the spirit of Christ. Verse 20 is a description of a carnal ministry: it is one that brings people into bondage, not liberty; it devours them selfishly; its leaders exalt themselves and not Christ; it smites the saints instead of helping to heal their wounds. How unlike Paul's ministry! What is there about the flesh that enjoys bondage, honors, and human schemes, instead of the simple love and grace of Christ?



### **III. His Sufferings for the Church (11:22–33)**

Paul's chief credentials of apostolic ministry were the wounds on his body that he received in serving Christ (see Gal. 6:17). Keep in mind that Paul wrote these things before the events in Acts 20ff transpired, and that most of the items on this list are not even mentioned in Acts! And the great apostle would never have mentioned them at all were it not for the fact that he was defending the Gospel. It is an arresting fact that Paul claims that his suffering, not the praise of men, was the best proof he had for asserting his apostleship. When selecting a spiritual leader, look for the scars.

These sufferings need little comment; they speak for themselves. Suffice to say that Paul went anywhere, endured anything, that he might take the Gospel to lost souls. Why is it that we do so much less today, when we have tools at our disposal that make the task much easier and faster?

It seems that Paul's heaviest burden was "the care of all the churches." Spiritual battles are always more costly than physical ones. Praying for the new Christians, feeding the lambs and the sheep, and warding off Satan's attacks are demanding tasks.

Notice that Paul did not boast of things that attested to his strengths, but rather his weaknesses! While the Judaizers were boasting of their converts, Paul was counting up the number of times he had been put in jail, beaten, or left in the sea! "I will glory in my infirmities while they boast about their powers!" he says, leading up, of course, to his account of the thorn in his flesh in chapter 12.

He closes with an especially interesting item: his escape from Damascus (Acts 9:23–25). How humiliating it must have been for this great rabbi to be lowered over a wall in a basket! Would the Judaizers have stooped this low? No! They would have compromised their message and walked out of the city gate! Paul faced suffering from the very first days of his ministry until the very last days. "Yea, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12, NKJV).

These attitudes Paul had toward the church ought to be in the heart of every pastor and church member today. We must be jealous over our churches and beware lest some satanic lie begin to lure the church away from true devotion to Christ. How easy it is for churches (and Christians) to rob Christ of the love He deserves. "You have left your first love!" Christ warned the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:4). Unless Christians exercise a holy jealousy over the church, it will drift away into sin.

Likewise, we must have an unselfish and generous attitude toward the church. We should not have the attitude "How much can I get?" but rather "How much can I give?" We should be willing to sacrifice so that the church might grow for the glory of God.

## **2 Corinthians 12**

While we often extract parts of this chapter for devotional blessings, we must keep in mind Paul's purpose in answering his critics and proving his apostolic calling. In the previous chapter, he had decided to recount those things that showed his infirmities, that Christ might receive the glory. We find in this chapter four proofs of Paul's apostleship.

## **I. His Revelations from Christ (12:1–6)**

The “man” Paul is talking about here is, of course, himself. Imagine being able to keep a thrilling experience like this secret for fourteen years! (Imagine, too, bearing suffering silently for fourteen years!) Certainly Paul was given divine revelations that no other man saw or heard. He was God’s chosen instrument to reveal to the world the greatness of God’s grace (note carefully Acts 26:16). The “third heaven” (v. 2) is paradise, the very heaven of the presence of God. What Paul heard from God, we do not know. Paul himself said nothing about this experience lest any Christian start honoring him more than he deserved. What humility!

God would not have given these revelations to Paul if he were not his chosen servant. As Paul argues in Gal. 1:11ff, the truths he taught came directly from God; Paul did not receive them secondhand from another apostle.

## **II. The Thorn in His Flesh (12:7–10)**

We do not know what this thorn was, but the best suggestion is an eye ailment. Paul was supernaturally blinded when converted (Acts 9:9), and it is possible that some weakness remained even in later years. Galatians 4:15 and 6:11 (“with what large letters”) suggest eye trouble. This would have been a trial to Paul both physically and emotionally, and could honestly be called a thorn (stake) in the flesh. (Sometimes prisoners were impaled on stakes and left to die a horrible death.) Whatever the thorn was, it was a burden to him, and it brought pain. He asked to have it removed.

The presence of this thorn was proof of his heavenly experience related in vv. 1–7; for God gave him the thorn (what a gift!) to keep him from getting proud. The enemies at Corinth had been accusing Paul of being weak (see 10:1 and 10; 11:6 and 29), and now he admits that he was weak, but that his weakness was a gift from God. The very weakness they accused him of was actually an argument for his apostolic authority!

There are several very practical lessons to be learned from Paul’s experience with the thorn:

(1) Spiritual blessings are more important than physical ones. Paul thought he could be a better Christian if he were relieved of his weakness, but just the opposite was true. “Faith healers” who preach that sickness is a sin have a hard time with this chapter.

(2) Unanswered prayer does not always mean the need is not met. Sometimes we get a greater blessing when God does not answer our prayers! God always answers the need even though it seems He is not answering the prayer.

(3) Weakness is strength if Christ is in it. Read 1 Cor. 1:26–31 for proof; remember Gideon’s pitchers, David’s sling, and Moses’ rod.

(4) There is grace to meet every need. Grace enabled Paul to accept his weakness, glory in it, and take pleasure in it! Paul knew that his weakness would bring glory to Christ, and that is all that mattered. See 2 Cor. 4:7.

## **III. His Apostolic Signs (12:11–18)**

Paul is not exalting himself when he claims to be second to none of the apostles; he is simply defending his office. Note that Paul lists several “signs” that proved his

apostleship, starting with patience! We expect him to mention miracles and wonders, but not patience! Yet it was Paul's steadfast endurance under trial that gave evidence that he was divinely called and commissioned (see chap. 4).

He mentions too his attitude toward money. It can be stated as an accepted fact that the servant's attitude toward material things indicates his spiritual life and outlook (Luke 16:1–15). A true servant of Christ cannot have a love of money. Paul reminds them that he and Titus proved their sincere love for the church in the way they supported themselves and generously helped the Corinthians.

Miracles and signs alone are no proof that a man is sent from God, for Satan himself has miraculous credentials (see 2 Thes. 2). When a servant's life and motives are pure, then we can trust any miracles that God may give; but when his or her life is not right, those miracles cannot be from the Lord.

#### **IV. His Courage in Dealing with Sin (12:19–21)**

“When I come to you, you will see how weak I am!” writes Paul. “I would rather you start cleaning up the church now,” he advises. “If you wait for me to do it, you'll see how humble I can be in the hands of the Lord!”

When the hireling sees the wolf coming, he runs away (John 10:13), but the true shepherd stays and protects the sheep. Paul was not about to run away. He even went so far as to name the sins that were rampant in the church. Though they had taken care of the offender mentioned in 1 Cor. 5, there were other sins now that needed attention. “A little leaven” had indeed leavened the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6).

There are two types of sin mentioned here: the social sins (v. 20) and the sexual sins (v. 21). There were both prodigal sons and their elder brothers in the church, and both needed to repent. What began as factions in 1 Cor. 1:10 had now grown into debates, strifes, and tumults! Satan was in command, for God is not the author of confusion. False teaching leads to false living.

This chapter might well serve as a test for Christian servants. While none of us receives special divine revelations today, we all must be in communion with God and receive our messages from Him only. We all must have grace to endure suffering. There dare not be any love of money or any fear of man that would hinder us from dealing with sin. May God help us to be the kind of servants that God can commend and bless!

## **2 Corinthians 13**

Paul has reached the end of his letter, and he closes with several admonitions to the church.

#### **I. Be Ready for My Visit (13:1–4)**

In 12:14 he had mentioned his third visit, and now he repeats his admonition. He refers to the OT law that two or three witnesses are needed to settle the truth of a matter

(Deut. 19:15), as though his third visit were God's final opportunity for the church to make matters right. He had told them before, and was now reminding them, that this visit would mean unsparing judgment to those who were guilty of sin. His boldness in dealing with sin would be proof enough that he was not a weakling! (See 10:10 and 11:6.)

His statement in v. 4 is interesting. In His death, Christ seemed to reveal weakness; but His resurrection revealed the power of God. In his previous visit, Paul showed seeming weakness as he served; this next visit would be different. There are times when we show His power in us by our seeming weakness; there are other times when we must be severe through the power of God. Paul's thorn in the flesh experience is an example of being "weak in Him" yet living by the power of God.

Had the Corinthians obeyed the Word of God, they would have spared themselves and Paul a great deal of agony. It is when Christians ignore or oppose the Word of God that they bring trouble upon themselves, others, and the church. How many pastors have gone through Gethsemane because of Christians who refuse to listen to God's Word!

## **II. Be Sure You Are Saved (13:5–7)**

The Corinthians were spending a great deal of time examining Paul; now it was time they examined themselves. Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." A true Christian experience will bear examination. "Are you even in the faith?" asked Paul. "Are you truly saved?" Every believer must prove his or her faith; no one can tell others whether or not they are born again.

A true Christian has Christ in him. The word "reprobate" means "counterfeit." The word literally means "not passing the test." His enemies had charged Paul with being a counterfeit (a false apostle), a charge that he denied in v. 6. He begged the Corinthians to turn away from evil living and speaking, not simply that they might thereby prove that Paul was a true apostle, but for their own good. If they repented, he would not have to prove his apostleship by coming to discipline them. He was willing to set aside this privilege for their sakes. Paul would have rather lost his reputation to see them helped spiritually than to have them continue in sin and force him to exercise his apostolic authority. Peter warns pastors that they should not exercise lordship over the church (1 Peter 5:1ff), and Paul is here manifesting that same humble spirit. The warning of discipline is never for the purpose of exalting the pastor, but always for leading the offender to the place of repentance.

In this day of satanic counterfeits, it is important that professing Christians know that they are saved. Remember the warnings in Matt. 7:15–29 and the startling truths of 2 Cor. 11:13–15.

## **III. Be Obedient to God's Word (13:8–10)**

In v. 8, Paul is not suggesting that there is no way to oppose the truth. Satan certainly opposes the truth with his lies, and people are more prone to believe his lies than they are to believe God's truth! Paul is saying that the repentance of the Corinthians would be "that which is honest" (v. 7) and according to the Word of God. Since they would be

obeying the truth, Paul could do nothing against them in terms of judging sin or disciplining the offenders. He himself did not want anything other than the truth in the church at Corinth.

In fact, Paul goes on to say that he would be glad to make this next visit another demonstration of his weakness (1 Cor. 2:1–5) if it meant that they would be living in the power of God. His aim was their perfection—their spiritual maturity in Christ. They were babes in Christ, carnal and worldly, and needed to mature. “I want to build you up, not tear you down,” he assured them. “This is why I am writing such a stern letter. I want you to start heeding God’s Word and making matters right in the church. If you do, I’ll not have to speak with sharpness when I come.”

#### **IV. Be Mature in Your Faith (13:11–14)**

Notice the love that flows from these final words. He calls all of the Corinthian Christians brethren, and makes no distinction between those who attacked him and those who supported him. “Farewell” (v. 11) means “rejoice.” Paul has written with tears (2:1–5), yet he found it in his heart to “rejoice evermore” and “in everything give thanks.”

“Be perfect” is another admonition to grow up in the faith (see v. 9). If they were mature Christians, then the blessing Paul closes with in these verses would be their portion. There would be comfort, unity, peace, and fellowship with one another and with God.

The “holy kiss” (v. 12) was an oriental custom among believers; a modern version might read (as J.B. Phillips puts it), “Shake hands all around” (PH).

Paul closes with one of the greatest of the Bible benedictions, the benediction of the Trinity (v. 14). The “grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” takes us back to Bethlehem, where He became poor for us (2 Cor. 8:9); “the love of God” takes us to Calvary, where God the Father gave His Son; and “the communion of the Holy Spirit” takes us to Pentecost, where the Spirit baptized all believers into the body of Christ. How fitting this benediction was for this divided, unspiritual church! Many churches need this benediction today.