



2 Corinthians

A Verse-By-Verse Commentary

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(Rev 5)

CONTENTS

(Hyperlinked- Clicking the title will take you to that chapter)

| | |
|------------------|-----|
| Chapter 1 | 3 |
| Chapter 2 | 33 |
| Chapter 3 | 52 |
| Chapter 4 | 75 |
| Chapter 5 | 99 |
| Chapter 6 | 129 |
| Chapter 7 | 156 |
| Chapter 8 | 176 |
| Chapter 9 | 203 |
| Chapter 10 | 223 |
| Chapter 11 | 247 |
| Chapter 12 | 292 |
| Chapter 13 | 321 |

CHAPTER 1

**Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother,
To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:**
2 Corinthians 1:1

The book of 2 Corinthians is comprised of 13 chapters and totals 257 verses. If you are ready for a 257-day analysis of this book, come along as we peer into its words. Feel free to invite a friend if you think they will be blessed as well!

Although the verse divisions at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 1 are different than the beginning of 2 Corinthians 1, the greeting is very similar in both. Referring to 1 Corinthians, it says -

"Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother,
²To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:" 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2

In 2 Corinthians, he has substituted "Sothenes" with "Timothy." Elsewhere, Timothy is noted as Paul's "son" which demonstrated a spiritual connection directly to Paul's heart based on their relationship. Here he is called "brother" because of the connection which should exist between him and all the faithful believers who are being addressed.

The inclusion of Timothy here is not without deeper purpose. Timothy was young and Paul wanted him to be confident in his ministry. And so, he is showing that there was equality between them that should be respected by the other believers as well. Further, there will be some points of perceived contention between the Corinthians and Paul which need to be addressed.

Paul had told the Corinthians that he would come to visit them when he left Ephesus, but his plans had changed. The introduction of Timothy, who had been with Paul, would allow him to be a witness who could substantiate that Paul's motives were not in any way impure towards the believers in Corinth.

As with 1 Corinthians, Paul establishes his apostolic authority by saying "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ." Noting that it is "by the will of God" shows that the selection came not by personal choice, but by the sovereign will and grand design of God. His coming words

are intended for "the church of God which is at Corinth," but there is also the greater intent of them being read to all believers in the area, of which Corinth was the capital. Thus, it is an encyclical letter. Any smaller churches, and any scattered believers, were to be included in the reception of his words.

Life application: Paul's inclusion of Timothy at the beginning of this letter bestows upon him a special dignity which would bolster the young man's confidence. It is good to evaluate others around us and see where we can act in a like manner. We are all deficient in one area or another. And so, with care and attention, we can be a participant in the growth of their weakness by using tactful and carefully targeted means. They may not even be aware of our efforts, but in the end, they will be better off if we devote such time towards those around us.

Heavenly Father, I would ask for the ability to see needs that arise in others and to be responsive to those needs as they arise. I know that empathy is a particular gift which is sorely needed in this world. I also know that I need more of it. Help me in this Lord, so that I can be a strong and faithful friend, mentor, and person of trust to those who are in need. May they see more of You in my attitude towards them. Thank You for hearing my heart today. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:2

This is Paul's common greeting, even if it contains slight variations. It is an exact repeat of 1 Corinthians 1:3. He has identified himself, his calling, who was accompanying him, and who the letter is directed to. After those formalities, he gives these words - "Grace to you and peace to you."

Grace is unmerited favor; it cannot be earned. This is a common greeting among the Greek people. Peace however is the more common greeting among the Hebrew people. In their language, the word is *shalom*. Shalom, however, is more than a greeting for calm or quiet, but a petition for wholeness and completion in all ways. Paul unites the two terms just as the church is being united between Jew and Gentile during his time. This grace precedes the peace because only after receiving God's grace can His peace truly be experienced.

This wonderful blessing to them is extended "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." It is a greeting from the eternal God – both the unseen Father and His Son who reveals the Father to us. Rather than being an argument against the deity of Jesus

Christ, it is an argument for it. He is tying the two in as one - Jesus being a member of the Godhead. He is not inferring some type of God/non-god distinction, but a harmonious blending of the two; both fully God.

Throughout his letters, as with the entire Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ is a concept and a precept which simply can't be missed. It is the very heart of what God has done for the reconciliation of the people of the world.

Life application: There may be someone around you today who is lacking peace. Take time today to tell them of God's grace. In doing so, they may come to the peace which is truly peace - reconciliation with God through a personal relationship with His Son.

Heavenly Father, the fragrance of flowers is such a wonderful delight. Different ones come out at different times and some of them literally envelope me in their all-permeating scent. They bring back memories of my youth and they tell me of the seasonal changes which show me everything is working according to an infinitely wise plan. I thank You and I praise You for the wondrous smells which You have given us in the flowers of the earth. Praises to You! Amen.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 2 Corinthians 1:3

Verse 3 begins the formal epistle, following the greetings of verses 1 & 2. In his words, Paul gives a general note of praise which is similar in each of his letters. Here he praises God in a spontaneous outbreak which could almost be considered a doxology. In the greeting, he notes the deity of Christ through the words "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The praise is to Christ's Father, but it is an implicit reference to Jesus' own deity because of the pattern given in Genesis 1 which shows that all things reproduce after their own kind. Jesus wasn't adopted as a son. Rather He came forth from God.

And this God is "the Father of mercies..." These words are an expression of a Hebrew mode of speaking where an adjective is substituted for a noun. It would then be synonymous with the term "merciful Father." However, there is more force than the mere phrase "merciful Father" because of the way it is constructed. Mercy and compassion describe Him and are a part of His unchanging attributes.

Further, Paul calls Him "God of all comfort." He is not only merciful, but His mercy transfers into compassion for those to whom He has bestowed His mercy. It is a

wonderful thought that not only are we granted release from the punishment we deserve, but the One who so releases us then comes to us with consolation and a hand of loving care.

In this verse, Ellicott notes that, "In the balanced structure of the sentence—the order of 'God' and "Father" in the first clause being inverted in the second—we may trace something like an unconscious adoption of the familiar parallelism of Hebrew poetry." Paul, despite being the Apostle to the Gentiles, never strayed far from His Hebrew upbringing and he transfers it to us in His New Testament writings.

Life application: Because of Jesus, we can see the evident mercy of God upon us. What we deserve, we are not given. Instead of wrath and punishment, we have been granted mercy. And further, God then provides us with abundant comfort as He tends to us. No matter how bad we may have it at any given time, it is far better than the best we could expect if we got what we truly deserved. Thus, let us always remember to thank God for the many blessings He has lavished upon us!

O God, when I reflect on the cross, I consider that what I deserved has been withheld because You took my justly warranted punishment upon Yourself. And then after granting such wondrous mercy, You then continue to pour out Your love and grace upon me in an endless stream of comfort and care. How can such love exist? And yet it does, for I see it every day as I walk in Your presence! Thank You for Your care of me. Amen.

...who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.
2 Corinthians 1:4

This verse is connected directly to the previous verse which said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort..."

It is this "God of all comfort" of which Paul continues to speak. It is He "who comforts us in all our tribulation." The "us" is speaking of all believers, but particularly himself, those with him, and the recipients of his letter, the Corinthians. We are included in this as well in that God has ensured this epistle is included in the Bible. Therefore, we can be confident that all tribulations we face do in fact include God's great hand of comfort.

And there is a reason for this in our lives. It is "that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble." In this, Paul gives an end purpose for our own tribulations. They come so that we will have the ability to comfort others in their times of tribulation.

If God is truly the "God of all comfort," and our comforting others in their own tribulations is an end purpose of the afflictions we face, then this means that God's comfort for those we in turn provide comfort to is being provided by us. Thus, we become the means of God's comfort of which He speaks.

In confirmation of this, Paul shows this to be so when our own ability to comfort others comes "with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted with." Jesus suffered and yet through His sufferings He was able to provide comfort to those who followed Him. They in turn suffered, and they in turn were able to provide comfort to those who followed them. It is a repeating cycle of care which stems originally from God who truly is the "God of all comfort." This is actually alluded to in the book of Hebrews -

"For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness." Hebrews 5:1, 2

As an additional note, Paul does not say that the only reason for our tribulations is to attain the ability to comfort others. Tribulations may come for correction, as an instrument of bringing us closer to the Lord, or simply for attaining knowledge that we would otherwise be lacking. In all though, when tribulations come, they are not unknown to God, nor is He uncaring concerning our situation.

Life application: God has promised never to leave us nor forsake us when we are in Christ. Let us be reassured in this, particularly when times of great trial or suffering arise.

Heavenly Father, despite the many trials and troubles which come my way, I will keep my eyes fixed on You and my heart directed to You. I will not let my faith slip because of temporary light afflictions. I know that greater things lie ahead for me because of the work of Jesus my Lord. Should I lose hope in You and Your promises, I would have nothing left in my times of trial! And so instead, I will cling to You even tighter. Amen!

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 2 Corinthians 1:5

There are numerous references to the sufferings of Christ in the Bible, and many of them are spoken of as being related directly to His disciples. In Colossians 1:24, Paul tells us that -

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church..."

The church is destined for suffering, just as it is destined for glory. Paul understood this, and he felt that as much as he suffered there was an abounding of consolation to be found at the same time. Nothing was lacking in the process of suffering. And the consolation which he felt was the surety that he possessed the Spirit of God. In knowing this, he was thus comforted because the Spirit is a guarantee of future glory for the believer. Hence, he notes exactly this in Philippians 3:10 -

"...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

In "being conformed to His death" we shall also be raised as He was to eternal life through "the power of the resurrection." There could be no shame in the suffering if there is the coming glory which that suffering leads to. Thus, there is the great consolation which "also abounds through Christ." Understanding this, believers are not to be ashamed of suffering, but instead are instructed to be willing to bear His reproach, knowing that we bear all the honor and future glory that comes with it. And so, the author of Hebrews admonishes us -

"Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach."

-Hebrews 13:13

Life application: Even if we have never really suffered for the name of Christ, many in the world have. We cannot assume that just because the place where we live is a harbor of safety for Christians, that it won't be attacked at some point. And therefore, we must always be ready to accept sufferings that may come our way, knowing that in them our consolation will also abound through Christ.

Heavenly Father, I sit at ease in this world, having never known true suffering for Christ. And yet, all around the world there are those who are facing torture and even death for the sake of His glorious name. Should those same persecutions come to my peaceful shores, I would ask for strength enough to hold fast to my faith and to be able to praise You through whatever trials I am set to endure. With this, I will be grateful. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 1:6

Paul's words continue from the thought of the previous verse. There he noted the logical chain of events from Christ's sufferings to the sufferings of the apostles. In their sufferings, they also abounded in Christ's consolation. In turn, he notes that there is a reason for their afflictions. It is "...for your consolation and salvation."

One thing leads naturally to another. Paul shows this explicitly in Philippians 1 -

"But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; ¹⁴ and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Philippians 1:12-14

It then is for a good purpose that the apostles were afflicted. The lessons learned by those who saw their sufferings led directly to their consolation and even salvation "which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer." We learn by example, and we can remember other's courage during afflictions which can then strengthen us in our walk. This is a natural human pattern, be it a soldier learning from his platoon sergeant, or a cowhand on the range learning from the older hands. To see that others can take difficulties shows us that we too, having a like nature, can take them as well.

Finally, it isn't just sufferings that we receive benefit from. It is also times of comfort. As Paul notes, "Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." The Corinthians were able to see both sides of the coin through Paul's afflictions and through his times of comfort. Because of this, they were able to process what happened to him and apply it to themselves and their own spiritual walk.

This progression is seen from Paul's hand in Romans 5 -

"And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Romans 5:3-5

Life application: Those who are wise will learn from those who go before them. If we pay heed to their times of trials and their times of rejoicing and grasp how they were affected by them, we can follow their examples when similar times come upon us. To think that we are experiencing something new which is unique to the human condition

is naive. And to think that we can handle such an instance better than those who have already experienced them without learning from them is only begging for greater troubles than we need to face.

Lord God, help me to be wise and discerning concerning the difficulties that come my way. You gave me parents who have faced similar trials in the past. You have put mentors in my life who have also experienced things I have yet to face. Help me Lord to look to their examples of what to do and what not to do instead of just trying to do things better on my own. I know that I'll be a lot better off if I just learn the lessons of the past and apply them to my here and now. Grant me such wisdom Lord. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 1:7

Again, as with the previous verses, Paul ties suffering in with comfort. It is true that we cannot fully appreciate things without a contrast with which to gauge them. If we always felt well, we wouldn't have an appreciation for what feeling well means. But when we get hurt or sick, we can then understand how good it is to feel normal. And when we get back to feeling normal, we can enjoy it in a new way.

If everything smelled sweet, we wouldn't have an appreciation for it. But when an objectionable odor comes along, we can then appreciate the sweet fragrances of the flowers more. In consideration of this, Paul has spoken of suffering and consolation. Here, he tells the Corinthians (and all who suffer in Christ and have read this letter), that the apostle's hope for us in our sufferings is steadfast.

They had suffered and they had received consolation. Likewise, they knew that we, being "partakers of the sufferings" would also "*partake* of the consolation." To show that the "our" is certainly a truth understood by the other apostles, we can go to the words of Peter. In his first epistle, he shows a similar thought for us to consider -

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*."

-1 Peter 5:10

The truth is that suffering stinks. Nobody willingly hopes for suffering. But in Christ, there is a good end to the sufferings we face, and there is a good reason why we have faced them. The fragrance of the consolation is there and it is all the sweeter because we too have suffered.

Life application: In the Bible, we are admonished to "fix our eyes on Jesus." In so doing, we won't get arrogant in the good times, and we won't become despondent in the difficult times. In Him is our perfect example to emulate and our perfect hope to anticipate.

Lord Jesus, I will keep my eyes steadfastly fixed on You. When things are good, I can look to You and realize that they came from You. In knowing this, I won't get arrogant or cocky. And when things aren't so great, I won't get despondent or downcast in my soul. Instead, I will know that You have gone before me in suffering, and You will be there for me at the end of mine. For sure You are my perfect example to emulate and my perfect hope to anticipate. Thank You for the stability that comes from keeping my eyes fixed on You. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 1:8

Paul has been writing in general terms and speech during his introductory comments. He now initiates a more specific line of thought beginning with "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren." This same terminology is used by him at least four other times in his letters. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 he says -

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope."

Continuing, he will now give specific details of the sufferings that he referenced in verses 3 through 7. They came about in Asia, meaning the part of Asia Minor in which Ephesus is the capital. This trouble may be referred to in one or more of the incidents recorded in Acts, but which cannot be definitively identified.

It may also be, as some suppose, an internal stress that he felt. If so, it could be the troubles which are identified in his first letter to the Corinthians, his concern over them, and the conflict he felt concerning what type of reception his words would bring. If this is so, he stressed over the matter in the greatest way. However, later verses seem to negate this possibility.

Whatever the burden, internal or external, it was felt by those who were with him. As he notes, "...we were burdened beyond measure, above strength." The term "beyond measure" comes from the Greek word *hyperbolé*, which means properly "a throwing

beyond." It then indicates excess. The burden he felt was in such a category, even "above strength."

The words are given as a superlative way of showing the nature of the situation. So bad it was "that we despaired even of life." His choice of wording translated as "despaired" is the word *exaporeó*. It is used only twice in the New Testament, and both are in this epistle. It comes from *ex* - out, and *aporeo* which is to be without a way of escape. Again, the use of his words is intended to let the Corinthians know the absolutely serious nature of the situation he and his companions faced.

Life application: Paul has taken the time to expand on his previous thoughts to show the superlative nature of his sufferings. Despite them, as seen in the previous verses, he was comforted. He then noted that the same comfort was a means of edifying and comforting his audience. If we can learn to use real life examples of our troubles and trials, we can then turn and show empathy for others who are living through their own trials. Reading our Bible daily is a good way of learning how to do exactly this. Don't let your Bible get dusty! Read it and think on it daily.

Lord, the Bible won't do me a bit of good if it sits on the shelf. The amount of dust it has accumulated is really an indictment of how I perceive this precious gift from You. Grant me the desire, the time, and the ability to pick it up, read it, and learn it each day and even throughout each day. I would pray that there would be far less dust on the Bible than on the TV remote! Grant me wisdom in this most important matter. Amen.

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 2 Corinthians 1:9

This verse should be taken and considered in light of the previous one which said, "...that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life." In this desperate state, Paul acknowledges that they questioned if they would even survive the ordeal (despaired of life) and the answer came back in their minds that they would not.

The word translated "sentence" is *apokrima*. It is a word not found anywhere else in the New Testament or even in Greek literature. It indicates a judicial sentence, meaning an answer. There seemed to be a decree that they would not survive the ordeal. But this led them to the truth which almost always seems to be the case with those in such despair - "...that we should not trust in ourselves."

The soldier in the foxhole will call out to God, knowing that he is incapable of making it without Him. The person lost at sea and going down below the raging waters knows when there is finally no hope but from God alone. In such instances, there is only the trust of God left. However, Paul's words add to the thought. Their trust wasn't that God would save them from the immediate trial, but that he would save them from the results of it.

The sentence seemed to be pronounced: death. And so, knowing that death was inevitable, they entrusted themselves to "God who raises the dead." If they were to die, which seemed to be the case, their hope extended beyond the grasp of death itself and found itself realized in the hope of the resurrection. This conforms to Paul's words of 1 Corinthians 15 -

"O Death, where *is* your sting?

O Hades, where *is* your victory?'

⁵⁶ The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor 15:55-57

Paul took comfort in the truth that Jesus Christ prevailed over death and so death had no mastery over him. Instead, even with the foe of the sentence of death awaiting him, he felt the powerful victory of Jesus Christ, an even stronger friend.

Life application: As Christians bury their dead, they will often "commit the soul of the departed loved one" into the hands of Jesus Christ, acknowledging the power of the resurrection. In this, the body-planted is but a seed waiting to be given the water of life to bring it back from the ground. This is truly our great hope and this is certainly where our ultimate joy should be!

Heavenly Father, should I face a sentence of death, my trust isn't in being rescued from that temporary sentence. Rather, my hope is found in release from the results of it. Death may have a temporary hold on me, but I know that I will rise victorious over that defeated foe! I know this because I personally bear the victory through Your Son, Jesus Christ my Lord. No fear here. Eternal life is assured. Hallelujah and Amen.

...who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, 2 Corinthians 1:10

In the previous verse, Paul spoke of the sentence of death which loomed over him and those he was with. He took this to heart. Knowing this, he said that they "should not

trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead." Now he continues by telling the Corinthians that it was God "who delivered us from so great a death." He has taken the extreme possibility of death that he faced and equated it to death itself to more effectively communicate the dire situation they faced. It is as if they had actually been resurrected in their deliverance, so sure was the sentence that hung over them.

And not only had they been delivered, but they continued to be delivered as he wrote his letter. The victory was not just in the past but ongoing. And more, he believed that it would continue into the future, stating "in whom we trust that He will still deliver *us*."

The word "trust" here is not the same Greek word as was in the previous verse. That word communicated the sense of "to have confidence." This word, *elpizo*, conveys the idea of hope. In essence, we are not to have confidence in ourselves, but we are to place our hope in God. No matter what we face, we can only rely on God and His promises for us. If we are to die, we have hope in the resurrection. If we are to live, it can't be because of our control over whatever the situation is, but only because of God's hand being in it. As the hand is unseen, it is a hope that we possess.

Life application: Can we honestly say that we will be alive in five minutes? Our heart could stop, our house could be struck by a meteorite, or we might get bitten by an unseen spider. We truly have no control over a single moment in time. Therefore, let us place our souls in the capable hands of the Lord and know that whatever we face, He is tending to it. We shall be delivered in life and through death because of the work of Jesus our Lord.

Lord God, having seen people around me die, I know that it can come at any time and in the most unexpected of ways. I cannot honestly count on being alive five minutes from now. Anything could happen and it would be arrogant of me to believe I had any control over the future at all. But I have a greater hope than this temporary life. I have the surety of the resurrection and the prospect of eternal life safely guarded in my heart. I have Jesus! Amen.

...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. 2 Corinthians 1:11

Paul's writings show that he truly believed in the effectiveness of prayers on behalf of others, meaning "intercessory" prayers. For example, in Philippians 1:19, he says -

"For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ..."

Here he shows the same belief to those at Corinth. In the previous verse, he had just noted the great deliverance which was received for him and those he was with. This also included the belief that they would have continued deliverance. And so, in a delicate way of asking for prayer, he writes as if they had been in prayer all along by saying, "...you also helping together in prayer for us." If they had been praying, he knew it was a help to them. And their continued (or newly-initiated) prayers would be heard for their on-going delivery.

And he gives the reason for this help through prayer by saying "that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf." The word for "persons" here is *prosopon* which literally means "faces." It is an expression which is found many times in the New Testament, and which carries over from the Hebrew's pictorial way of describing a person. Thus, the mind is given an image of many faces jointly being lifted to God in thanks. Ellicott notes an interesting concept concerning this word -

"The use of the word *prosopopœia*, however, for "personifying," and of *prosôpon* for the characters in a drama, indicates that the noun was beginning to be used in a different sense, and this must clearly have been well established when it came to be used in theological language for the three "persons" of the Godhead. It is interesting to note, however, as a fact in the history of language, that, if this be its meaning here, it is probably one of the earliest extant instances of its being so used."

In other words, the term "persons" of the Godhead has always seemed cumbersome because we think of persons as distinct and separate without any true unity of essence. However, the use of the word *prosopon* for "person" may make the concept easier to grasp than some other word indicating an individual person as we think of it today. It wouldn't mean God is one Person with three faces, but three persons in one essence, just as those in prayer are united in a single way even though they are individuals.

Regardless of this though, Paul notes that these many faces, because of their united prayer, would give thanks "for the gift *granted* to us through many." The gift refers to their delivery from death, something the many would be thankful for because of knowing that their prayers had been heard and responded to.

Life application: On several occasions, Paul notes the effectiveness of prayers, including the greater effectiveness of united prayers on behalf of a given person or issue.

Therefore, it is right and proper to jointly lift up individuals or specific issues to God. And we should do so with the confidence that these prayers are heard, and they are responded to according to His wisdom and in accord with His plans.

Lord, thank You for the time of prayer that I have each day. There are quiet moments alone with You, there are prayers united with others that are close by, and there are prayers united with like-prayers by others around the world. Sometimes I make short, spontaneous prayers of praise or petition which come from my heart and roll off my tongue at any given moment. And I know that every one of these prayers is heard by You and will be responded to according to Your wisdom. And so, I will continue to pray without ceasing, knowing that Your ear is attentive to each one I make! Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 1:12

In the previous verses, Paul spoke of the great trials he had faced, and the prayers lifted up for him concerning that ordeal, as well as his on-going trials, all leading to his deliverance. Based on that, he now offers this thought. Beginning with, "For our boasting is this..." The word for "boasting" is translated by some as "rejoicing," "pride," "confidence," and "glory." It is a boast, but it is one directed towards God. And so "glorying" is a good word to help transmit that idea.

What he and those he was with "boasted" or "gloried" in was "the testimony of our conscience." In the book of Acts and in his epistles, Paul uses the term conscience as a most important aspect of this life. It was a conscience filled not with his own attitudes and desires, but one filled with living for the Lord. He says it this way in Acts 23:1 -

"Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, 'Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.'"

This "conscience" that he speaks of now toward the Corinthians is "that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity." He knew that their actions were always in line with the truth of God and with the good of others in mind. There was nothing pretentious or showy about their conduct. Instead, there was humility and honesty instilled by God in it.

In further explanation, he notes that it was "not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God." In 1 Corinthians 2, he wrote this -

¹"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ²For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ³I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. ⁴And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

In the same fashion, he is again telling the Corinthians that their words and actions were those of people living "in the spirit" and not "in the flesh." Instead of following the way of the world in their conduct, they attempted to live by the grace of God. And finally, he notes that this grace was "more abundantly toward you."

His love for those in Corinth is evident in these words. The first letter that he wrote to them addressed divisions and conflicts in the congregation. He knew that his life and actions towards them had to reflect the highest character and godliness in order that they may not become disenchanted with a seeming "hypocrite" in their presence. For this reason, he endeavored to be completely holy before them. In this, he could then glory in God who bestowed such grace as to live in this manner.

Life application: Eyes are always watching our actions. Our non-believing neighbors and co-workers see us and make value judgments about Christ based on what we do. But also, those in the church are watching. If one weaker in the faith sees that our actions aren't the epitome of character and godliness, they may also decide that the walk isn't worth the effort. Let us always attempt to walk in holiness before the Lord and in the presence of others.

Heavenly Father, I know that others are watching my life and actions and are then making value judgments about the faith I possess in You - Is it true? Is it noble? Is it honoring of God? Help me to be cautious with my words, careful with my actions, and circumspect in how I live my life before others. I know that their ultimate end is based on a relationship with Jesus. And so, help me to reflect as a person who will lead others to Him, not from Him. This I pray that You will be glorified. Amen.

For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end... 2 Corinthians 1:13

This verse has been translated and analyzed in a variety of ways showing the difficult nature of the words that Paul has written. And yet, it seems to be an appeal to the Corinthians that his letters to them are clear and without ambiguity.

It may be inferred that Paul was told that some of the Corinthians accused him of writing things in such a way that he would have an "out" when challenged on the intent of what he wrote. If this is so, Paul is defending his letters as clear and concise and without ambiguity or equivocation.

To convey this he says, "For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand." Said another way, "The message is clear on the surface and as you have read it, that was its intent." In the Greek, there is a play on the words which cannot be reproduced in our English language. The words "you read" are *anaginōskete*, and the word "understand" is *epiginōskete*. Ellicott gives his analysis of the wordplay -

"I have no hidden meaning in what I write and you read. What you read you read aright in its plain and simple sense. I hope" (the very hope implies that it had been otherwise) "that the more you know me the more will you so read me and judge me even to the end, the great day when the Lord shall come and all things shall be made plain." Charles Ellicott

As he noted, Paul's continued words of, "Now I trust" implies that they had felt what he had written was not plain and simple. For them to reconsider that, he fully states, "Now I trust that you will understand, even to the end..." He is asking them to trust his words unflinchingly, even to death itself, which is implied in the words "the end." For all times, and in the life of any believer who reads his words, it is his intent to properly explain and clearly word every precept needed for proper conduct, holy living, and right doctrine.

If we consider that the words of the Bible are given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can then further contemplate the truth of this message. God may hide intricate details, patterns, and pictures in His word, but He will never give us a word which is ambiguous or unclear. It would be contradictory to His very nature to do so. Therefore, we can read the Bible, taking it at face value, but always remembering context. To some, things may seem contradictory when taken out of context. However, by keeping things in their proper place we will always see God's word clearly presented and fully reliable.

Life application: When someone challenges the Bible's reliability, it is because they have misapplied some portion of it. Instead of doing the hard work and searching out its

truths in a methodical fashion, they will take it apart in unintended ways, thus making it out to be a faulty source of wisdom. Don't be fooled by such people. They have already fooled themselves, and there are enough fools in the world because of this.

Lord God, in understanding Your word a bit more each day, I am fully convinced that it is clear, accurate, filled with truth, and having no contradictions at all. It is a perfect word for my mind, a useful tool for gaining wisdom, a source of joy in times of trouble, and a precious gem more valuable than gold or silver. It is the lamp for my feet and the light for my path. I thank You for this precious, superior word! Thank You for the Holy Bible. Amen.

... (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. 2 Corinthians 1:14

This thought is the continuation of the previous verse. Taken together, they read -

"For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end ¹⁴ (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."

His words "in part" may be speaking of the Corinthians' knowledge concerning Paul (that it was limited), or it could be speaking of those in Corinth who agreed with Paul (being only a portion of them; the others still not accepting his apostleship). Either way, there was an understanding of him by the church at Corinth. And this understanding was "that we are your boast as you also *are* ours."

Paul is indicating first and foremost that his boasting is in those whom he has raised up to be Christians who are mature in their faith. When he stands before the Lord, he would be able to boast in a life which was served for His honor and glory, knowing that he had not frittered away his time or somehow done less than his very best for those under his care. This same sentiment is found in other epistles as well. Two examples are-

"For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy."

-1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20

"Do all things without complaining and disputing,¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." Philippians 2:14-16

In his words concerning himself which say, "...that we are your boast" it is certainly speaking in the same context. It is a future boast when they stand before the Lord as well. As Ellicott states it - "I trust that you will one day recognise that you have as much reason to be proud of me as I have to be proud of you."

At that wondrous moment when believers are to stand before Christ, Paul looked forward to the Corinthians saying, "We were trained by a godly and Christ-centered man named Paul." This is certainly the case because Paul finishes with the thought, "...in the day of Christ Jesus." It is a future hope that Paul is writing about, one that each believer will face at the Bema Seat of Jesus Christ.

Life application: Will there be boasting by others of your work for the Lord? Will they say, "This person led me to Christ"? Will they say, "This person mentored me to become a strong and competent disciple"? And likewise, will those who ministered to you be able to boast over who you became as a believer in the Lord, or will they be embarrassed at how you wasted your few short years in Christ?

Heavenly Father, I have just a few short years to walk in Your presence. I know that I will stand before Jesus and give an account for how I spent those years. Will those who led me to You be satisfied with how I used the instruction they gave me? Will my Lord be pleased with the life I lived for Him? Or will I just receive the Gift and then fritter away my years in back-sliding? Which will it be? Lord, give me the desire to walk rightly before You, redeeming the time and focusing on the glory to come, not on the temporary, earthly life I now live. Amen.

And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit— 2 Corinthians 1:15

The "confidence" that Paul is referring to is his statement in verse 13 which said, "I trust you will understand, even to the end." In other words, Paul had said something in his previous letter to them which had not come to pass and he wanted them to know that he was not just saying one thing and arbitrarily doing another thing.

As he will explain, he had originally planned that he would leave Ephesus and travel directly to Corinth. After that, he would then head to Macedonia and return to Corinth, from which he would sail back to Jerusalem. However, in 1 Corinthians 16:5, 6 he had already changed those plans to instead go through Macedonia first. The "second benefit" that he speaks of was the original plan of having two visits.

The "benefit" in Greek is literally "grace." Paul wasn't just speaking about a happy occasion which would result from his visit, but instead a granting of divine grace. However, he was precluded from this by a change in his plans. He will continue to discuss this issue, giving a full explanation for why he didn't follow through with the original arrangement.

Life application: Sometimes we think we know the motives of why someone takes a particular action and we allow it to upset us, even to the point where we feel resentment and anger. And yet, there may have been completely innocent motives for the action, or there could have been unavoidable circumstances which arose and which necessitated the change. It is always good to review the whole situation carefully before letting our emotions take over and ruin the day.

Lord, it sure is easy to assume we know the motives of other people's actions and to let them spoil our mood or even our friendships. But unless we know what they were thinking, we're leaping ahead without all the information. I know I've done this a jillion times and I've spoiled many parties over nothing. Help me to be wise and discerning as things arise in life that may not be as how I first perceive them. I know that if I can just calm down, step back, and be willing to talk things through, I will be a lot better off. Be with me in this, O God. Amen.

...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. 2 Corinthians 1:16

Paul's words continue the previous verse. They convey his original intentions, though these things never actually came to pass. It was at first his desire to "pass by way of you to Macedonia." In other words, it was his longing to go first to Corinth for a visit and then on to Macedonia after that.

After his visit to Macedonia, he intended to then turn around and go once again through Corinth to have that "second benefit" mentioned in the previous verse. He truly desired their company and their fellowship for that second time. And finally, after this second visit was coming to a close, he said he desired to "be helped by you on my way to

Judea." This "help" meant conducting him to the ship from the city. It is a similar thought to that found in 1 Corinthians 16:6 -

"And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go."

In this, and in many other instances, we get clues to the fact that Paul had a disability, probably extremely poor eyesight, which necessitated that he be assisted in his travels. When leaving Corinth, he was hoping for an escort of any Corinthians that would like to see him off at the port. It is a touching note from his hand showing his sincerity in these original plans which were later amended.

Life application: Seeing off missionaries is a good way of honoring them. By giving them a grand send off, it is acknowledging to them that they are important people doing work which is necessary and appreciated. Should you have missionaries visiting your area, be sure to recognize them for their noble efforts.

Lord God, I really thank You for those people who have stepped out and accepted the role of being missionaries in other nations in hopes of making converts to the glorious gospel of Your Son. How easy it is to stay at home where there is comfort and ease. But how noble it is for someone to set that aside and be willing to go to remote places where comfort is forgotten and ease is the last thing available! Lord, lavish a reward upon those who are truly devoted to You in those remote places. Let them feel Your presence in a grand way. Amen.

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?

2 Corinthians 1:17

In a roundabout way of explaining why he chose not to come to Corinth, as he originally planned and as he noted in the preceding verses, Paul asks rhetorically, "When I was planning this, did I do it lightly?" In other words, was he just saying, "I may come or I may not... it all depends on how I feel at the time." Were his words vacillating and unsure?

The Greek translated as "lightly" is *elaphria*. It is only used this one time in the New Testament and it means "levity," i.e., fickleness. It comes from another similar word which means light, as in not heavy or burdensome. And so, he is refuting the charges of those who claimed he was fickle or insincere in his dealings with them.

Continuing, he asks, "Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh...?" "According to the flesh" is probably referring to a person who easily makes promises and then easily reneges on those promises, showing that he lives in a carnal and self-centered manner. It could also have the second meaning of a person who is weak and unable to say what he really means out of fear of alienating others. Either way, his asking this as a question is intended to show that such is not the case.

And finishing up this verse, he asks whether they believe that with him "there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No." In this is a portion of the teaching of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5, he said this -

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' ³⁴ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

-Matthew 5:33-37

This same sentiment is cited by James in his letter (5:12). It thus was by this time a commonly taught and understood precept. Paul was asking if they felt he was failing to adhere to the words of Jesus and speaking out of both sides of his mouth at once. The rhetorical nature of these questions shows that none of this was the case. He will defend his actions to show this is so.

It should be understood that each phrase in this verse carries a bit of ambiguity and can be viewed from different ways. It is as if Paul is purposefully using such ambiguous wording to cover any and all possibilities concerning accusations against him. In this the Pulpit Commentary says, "There is probably no clause in the New Testament of which the certain sense must be left so indeterminate as this."

Life application: The Bible asks us to be trustworthy, even to the simple promises we make. When others hear our words, they should be willing to accept them at face value. In this, if we don't follow through with them, we need to have a very good reason for it. We also must be able to defend why we didn't live up to the words we have uttered.

Lord, You have asked us to let our Yes be Yes and our No be No. We are to be so trustworthy that when we speak, people will accept our words at face value. Help me in this Lord! Give me the courage to speak only the truth and then the fortitude to follow

up with the words I speak in a manner which will show that I am a person of integrity. Let others not see a fault in Christian honor when they see me. Instead, may my words bring honor to the Name I bear - Jesus! Amen.

But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. 2 Corinthians 1:18

Paul's words here have been construed in various ways. The two predominant views are that this is an oath. "As God is faithful, so are my words to you," or that God will vindicate him in his words to them. Either way, his words contain and relay the sense that what he has spoken and continues to speak to those at Corinth is in accord with the words of the Lord.

His "Yes" has meant "Yes" and his "No" has meant "No." They were not fickle or faltering, but firm and fixed. This note of God's faithfulness is not unique to this letter. It is a theme which he has transmitted often. Not only does he speak of God's faithfulness to the Corinthians on several occasions, but also to those in other areas. One example is in his first letter to the Thessalonians -

"He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*." 1 Thessalonians 5:24

He also conveys this in his second letter to them as well -

"But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one."
-2 Thessalonians 3:3

Paul wants those in Corinth to know that just as God is faithful, the words he has spoken are faithful. God is his witness to the integrity of his words.

Life application: Integrity is a dying attribute of people in the world today. But when one possesses it, they are remembered for it. As Christians, we are called to speak openly and honestly so that others may see in us truthful disciples of the Lord. We bear His name and therefore others will make value judgments concerning Him based on how we present ourselves.

Lord God, it is my hope and desire that when others interact with me, they will see someone who is truthful and willing to place his integrity above the temporary and fleeting passions of the world. I know that my every action may be evaluated by someone else, and that this will in turn reflect upon You. May I never conduct myself in a way which would diminish You in their eyes. May it be so. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 1:19

This verse shows us that Silas is the same as Silvanus mentioned elsewhere. With one name or another, he is mentioned in Acts and some of the epistles. But, along with this verse, the verse which ties the two as being the same person is Acts 18:5 -

"When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ.*" Acts 18:5

Knowing who was with Paul at that time and then comparing it to the timing of this epistle, it is certain they are the same person. And so, using Silvanus and Timothy as support for his words to the Corinthians because they were both reputable souls, Paul continues with his defense concerning his actions.

He calls on an understanding of "the Son of God, Jesus Christ" by his audience. In this, he cannot be referring to a person who is an adopted son of God, but rather the true and only begotten Son of God. Hence, the highlighting of Him in this way - marking Him out as unique and distinct from all others. It was He "who was preached among you by us." The truly begotten of the Father was the subject of their preaching. As this is so, their words are being tied into the truthfulness of their actions.

It would make no sense to preach the embodiment of truth, Jesus Christ, just to turn around and act in an untruthful manner. In essence, there is the "Proof of the unchangeableness of the doctrine from the unchangeableness of the subject of it, namely, Jesus Christ" (JFB Commentary).

The doctrine of those who preached was sure because of the One of whom they spoke. In Him what they communicated "was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes." The words "in Him was Yes" are literally, "Yes has come to pass in Him." Jesus is the embodiment of truth and He demonstrated this in His life and actions. For a few corresponding verses which confirm this, we can go to the following -

"I am the way, the truth, and the life." John 14:6

"For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

-John 18:37

"These things says He who is holy, He who is true." Revelation 3:7

"And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war." Revelation 19:11

As Jesus is so represented as the truth, and as Paul proclaimed the truth of Jesus, he himself, along with the others with him, determined to always be as truthful as the One whom they proclaimed. There was no vacillating or wavering in a "Yes and No" but rather in Him was "Yes."

Life application: Because we bear the name of Jesus, we need to ensure that our words to others reflect His character as well. As He is the embodiment of truth, let us always be truthful in the words we convey to others.

Lord God, it is so easy to fall into little untruths to cover up a fault or an unplanned event which arises. It's not difficult to fall into outright lies as well when it will cover something we have done wrong. But Lord, I bear the name of Jesus who embodies truth itself. Because of this, I know that it is as important to be as truthful as I can be. Help me in this Lord. Help me to always be a person of integrity and honesty. When others see me, I pray that You will not be diminished in their eyes. Amen.

For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 2 Corinthians 1:20

Speaking of Christ Jesus, Paul says that "all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes." However, the translation here with the inserted "are" makes "Yes" the predicate of the promises. That is not the intent. Rather, what Paul is saying is that Christ is the incarnate answer to the promises of God. Thus, it should be stated as a separate clause. "For how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the yea." (ERV)

It is Christ who is the fulfillment of the promises. When we call on Him, those promises which were fulfilled in Him now belong to us. Going on it says, "and in Him Amen." Vincent's Word Studies notes that "In giving this answer in His person and life, Christ puts the emphatic confirmation upon God's promises." God made promises and those promises are emphatically fulfilled in Jesus.

This is explained by Him when He spoke to the leaders of Israel in John 5 -

"And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. ³⁸ But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. ⁴⁰ But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."

-John 5:37-40

He is the fulfillment of Scripture and therefore the promises of God which were made to the people of God (to Abraham for example, explaining that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed) are realized in Him. Paul gives this thought in Romans 15 -

"Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, ⁹ and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy..." Romans 15:8, 9

And in the book of Hebrews, we read this -

"And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Hebrews 9:15

Every Messianic promise is realized in Him and in Him is the Amen. It means He is faithful and true. In Him is the confirmation and establishment of those promises. In Revelation 3:14 He is called the "Amen" to demonstrate this.

Life application: As you read the Bible and consider the promises of God, realize that God Himself fulfilled each of them in Christ. When we receive Him, those promises now belong to us because of Him. Let us be ever-thankful for the wonderful, tender mercies of God who promised and fulfilled for beings such as us.

Heavenly Father, You made many promises in the Old Testament about a new life and a new hope of living in Your presence again. And then You sent Jesus to fulfill those promises. In Him is the "Yes" of all of them. Now that I have called on Him, I am included in the fulfillment of them. I am again reconciled to You through what He did. It all came from You, it all belongs to You, and all the glory is to be given to You. Thank You for Jesus who has made all things new. Amen!

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God.

2 Corinthians 1:21

Paul ties these words in with the "Amen" of the previous verse. There he said -

"For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."

In Christ is the Amen, the establishment of who we are in God because in Him is the fulfillment of all of God's promises. When we unite with Him, we participate in those things, thus we are established. Expanding on that, he says "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ..." In other words, our position is externally granted and fixed. It is not something that we have done, but something that has been done for us. This "us" is probably referring to Paul and those whom he was with because he says "us with you."

Paul and those with him, along with the Corinthians (and any who have received Christ) have been established in Christ. Further, He "has anointed us." The word for "anointed" is chrio. It is used only five times in the New Testament. All other four instances are referring to Jesus - Luke 4:18, Acts 4:27, Acts 10:38, Hebrews 1:9. Jesus is the "Anointed," which is the meaning of Christ. And in Him we have received an anointing from God.

In the Greek of this verse, there is a change in the tense of the verbs. The word "establishes" is a present participle, but the "anoints" is an aorist. We are continually being established and upheld in Christ, but we are, at whatever moment we received Christ "anointed." Therefore, it should read "anointed" rather than "has anointed." It may seem trivial, but Paul's words were written 2000 years ago and yet they still apply today, 2000 years later. When a person calls on Christ, he is anointed in Christ. From that moment on he is established and continues to be established. "Now He who is continually establishing us with you in Christ and, who anointed us, is God." 2 Corinthians 1:21 (CGV - Charlie Garrett Version)

Life application: God has done everything necessary for us in Christ. He has done the work through Him, He has anointed us in Him, and He continues to establish us in Him. It is by grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves. Rather, it is the gift of God. Let us not boast, but instead proclaim the greatness of God in Christ.

Heavenly Father, grant us the ability to endure the heartaches of this life. They come at the most unexpected times and in the most unexpected ways. And some are utterly debilitating, robbing us of our sleep, our ability to concentrate, and even to taste the food that we must force down. We are limited in our understanding of why things happen and we cannot see the end which You can. In these times of distress, help us to

have the confident trust that You have it all under control. Grant us Your peace through the overwhelming storms of life. Amen.

...who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

2 Corinthians 1:22

In the previous verse, Paul noted that those who believe in Christ are anointed by God. Tied to this comes another benefit, an eternal one. Understanding what he is speaking of here should completely put at ease anyone who has been confused about the doctrine of "eternal salvation." In other words, can a person "lose" their salvation? The answer is "No!" God Himself has anointed us and God Himself has "sealed us."

The word for "sealed" is *sphragizó*. It means "properly to seal (affix) with a signet ring or other instrument; to stamp." It "signifies *ownership* and the full *security* carried by the backing (full authority) of the owner. 'Sealing' in the ancient world served as a 'legal signature' which guaranteed the promise (contents) of what was sealed." A change in ownership has taken place and that change, from the devil to God, bears His seal. As there is no higher authority in heaven or on earth, it must be an eternal salvation. God does not make mistakes.

Further, as evidence of this, Paul notes that He has "given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." The word "guarantee" is the Greek word *arrabón*. It properly means, "A pledge; an earnest, earnest-money, a large part of the payment, given in advance as a security that the whole will be paid afterwards." The sealing of the Spirit is "a guarantee." To say that a person who receives God's anointing, seal, and Spirit could then lose it is to accuse God of reneging on a guarantee that He has made; it is an impossible situation to even consider.

As Paul says in Ephesians 1:13, 14 -

"In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."

Paul notes there, using the same words *sphragizó* and *arrabón*, the certainty of eternal salvation. Any other verses which appear to contradict this doctrine have either been misunderstood or they've been taken out of their intended context. God is not in the business of making errors, especially with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

This Greek word, *arrabón* is a transliteration from the Hebrew word *erabon*. Both words are used only three times in Scripture. In the Old Testament, they are all found in Genesis 38, in a story which seems so peculiar that it is almost universally misunderstood. The three times it is found in the New Testament are in Paul's writings - 2 Corinthians 1:22, 2 Corinthians 5:5, and Ephesians 1:14. To obtain a fuller understanding of the significance of that beautiful Old Testament passage found in Genesis 38, please make time to watch this sermon on YouTube or Sermon Audio.

Life application: If you are like every other person on earth (and you are), then you will fail your Lord often after you call out to Him for salvation. However, He has received you and you have been sealed for the day of redemption. Don't allow others to make you feel you have "lost" your salvation. You could no more do so than God would reject His own Son Jesus. You have moved to Him and you are "in" Him. You are secure. Press on in His good graces with this surety. Pick up the pieces of your sin and rebellion, place them in the garbage can, and move on in His security.

Lord God, thank You for the absolute security I have in You because of the work of Jesus. I am fully confident in the doctrine of "eternal salvation" because it is what Your word teaches. I know that I will stumble and fall, and I know that You have already forgiven me for doing so. Grant me wisdom to live properly before You, but keep reminding me that I am Yours, now and forever, because of the work of another... because of Jesus! Hallelujah and Amen.

Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. 2 Corinthians 1:23

After carefully building up his words thus far in Chapter 1, Paul now gives the reason for having not come directly to Corinth as he first proposed. In doing so, he calls out words unique in the New Testament writings by saying, "I call God as witness against my soul..." He had just a few verses earlier confirmed to those in Corinth the words of Jesus about letting your "Yes" be "Yes" and your "No" be "No." And yet, he now makes this added statement as a confirmation of his honesty and integrity.

This then is not a contradiction of the intent of Jesus' words. Instead, it shows clearly that Paul believed they were a general principle for always being truthful in speech to others, but at the same time they are not a "rigid exclusion of the right to appeal to God in solemn cases and for good reasons" (Pulpit Commentary). God has shown us, through His word, that we can in fact make such bold claims when the situation so demands it.

In the case of Paul here, he had a very good reason for not going through Corinth and it required this oath when giving it. In his words to them, he gives the reason as "...to spare you I came no more to Corinth." If he had come at the time he originally said he would come, it would not have been a visit filled with love and tenderness, but one filled with discipline and probably very hard feelings between both sides. He alluded to this in 1 Corinthians 4 -

"What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" 1 Corinthians 4:21

Paul only had the best intent for the Corinthians and their mutual friendship in mind. It is this that he now conveys to them.

Life application: We are certainly implored by the Lord to fulfill the words that we speak, but there may be times when amending our actions are actually more necessary than fulfilling the original plans we have conveyed. If so, however, we should be careful to explain why we have made the changes, including what was involved in the decision. Paul has set a good example of this for us in 2 Corinthians 1.

Lord, grant me the wisdom to know when to promise and when to withhold promises that I may have to later break. But if I cannot fulfill my original words to others, help me to be able to properly explain my motives and the benefits to all concerned for why they had to be changed. Help me to never take my words lightly, but to be conscientious about what I have spoken so that others see a person of integrity and trustworthiness. I ask this so that they will see my devotion to You in the most favorable light. Amen.

Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand. 2 Corinthians 1:24

Paul's words here are given to explain his words of the previous verse. He just said, "...to spare you I came no more to Corinth." He is qualifying that statement now so that his audience knows that neither he nor any of the apostles had "dominion over" their faith.

Each person comes to Christ in the same way, by grace through faith, and they have the right to grow in their own way. If they are "on-fire" for the Lord, or if they quietly follow Him in their hearts, they have dominion over their own faith. Although believers should be encouraged to attend Bible studies and worship services, it is not up to someone else to dictate to them whether they actually do. This is true even with Paul and the apostles, as he now notes.

Instead, they "are fellow workers for" their joy. They were to encourage, build up, correct in doctrine, etc. But they were not the lords over the faith of those they ministered to, and that same tradition carries on today between pastors and congregants within the church. This is explicitly noted by Peter in his first epistle -

"...nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." 1 Peter 5:3

Like Paul of the past, pastors are to be examples to the flock, not lords over them. Paul understood this and wanted those in Corinth to understand it as well. His cancelled visit to Corinth was to spare them from a loss of joy, not a loss of fellowship with Christ. And the reason for this is because for them, as with every true believer, it is "by faith that you stand." How can someone else control the faith of another? They cannot! And therefore, they have no right to exercise dominion over that same faith. This notion that we are *saved* by faith is stated by Paul many times. The idea that we also *stand* by faith is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 -

"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand." 1 Corinthians 15:1

Life application: If you are in a church where the pastor wields too much authority over your spiritual life, you should be extremely careful. This can be, and has many times, turned into a cult with terrible consequences. Jim Jones, the Branch Davidians, the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses and many other cults started with leaders that exercised dominion over their congregants. Many times in history it has ended badly for the lives of those people. And the eternal consequences of such a relationship lead in only one sad direction.

Heavenly Father, I am so thankful that I stand in my relationship to You by faith alone. There is nothing I need to do in order to be saved except to believe the gospel message of Christ. And there is nothing I need to do after that in order to remain saved. I stand by faith in that same wondrous Lord. Knowing this, I now ask for the heart to exercise that faith in the pursuit of knowledge and obedience to Your word, knowing that my eternal rewards or losses will be counted based on this. Give me a yearning to know and serve Jesus more! Amen.

CHAPTER 2

But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow.

2 Corinthians 2:1

As the previous chapter concluded, Paul said that he had not come to Corinth as previously planned in order to spare them. Building upon that now at the beginning of this chapter, he says that he "determined this within myself..." He had changed his plans based on careful forethought, not as a rash and sudden whim. He thought the matter through and made his determination. In this fixed state of mind, he said that he "would not come again to you in sorrow."

This is not speaking of his sorrow, but the sorrow that would have to be levied upon the Corinthians by his correction of their conduct and doctrine. This will be more completely explained in the next verse. Paul is showing that he had the very best interest of the Corinthians in mind at all times and that he cared for them as his own special flock.

Life application: When considering those you fellowship with, always try to remember to have their best in mind. If there is a reason why you should temporarily distance yourself from them, make sure that they understand why. The confusion which results from not knowing why people take certain actions can cause personal or even congregational grief. Paul has given us this example in his actions towards the Corinthians and it is good that we follow suit in it.

Wondrous God! How good it is to sit together with other believers in unity. Together we can focus on Your word and how it points to the glorious work of Jesus our Lord. From such fellowship and worship comes a bond like no other. They truly are a sort of extended family. Help us to always act this way towards one another and to let a spirit of harmony exist in our congregation. Amen.

For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? 2 Corinthians 2:2

Opening this chapter, Paul noted that concerning his visit to the Corinthians he had decided that he "would not come again to you in sorrow." The reason for this is explained in this verse now. "For if I make you sorrowful" relates to the previous verse. If he came in sorrow, meaning with the need to discipline, then they would be filled with sorrow.

The "I" in this is emphatic and it implies that there were others who caused them trouble as well, thus he is singling himself out to make his point - "For if I (emphatic) make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?" The intent of his words is that there existed such a relationship between them. If one side were sorrowful, the other side was there to comfort the other. However, if both sides were sorrowful, then neither could comfort the other. There would be only a mournful and tense gathering.

In this, the question is rather abrupt and it uses a singular, not a plural number for "he" and "the one." Some see this as the man referred to in 1 Corinthians 5. He is just a single member of the church, but he has caused the entire congregation to lose their joy. However, what is more likely is that this is referring to the whole collectively. In other words, "Who is he then...?" The reason this is likely is that the entire congregation was involved in allowing the offender to stay in the church, despite his immoral conduct. This is what Paul will address in order to correct. Because of this, the singular speaks for each individual within the whole.

Paul knew that the entire congregation would mourn over his visit and needed discipline and thus there would have been only sorrow for all concerned. Because of this, such a visit would ultimately be unproductive.

Life application: Paul has demonstrated wisdom by addressing an issue via letter rather than personally to maintain a sense of harmony between the believers. Eventually, a personal visit would be in order. If we can learn from this example, we will be better off than always assuming that a personal face-to-face visit is the best option in all circumstances.

Heavenly Father, I absolutely cherish those I fellowship with. But like a family, it is inevitable that little annoyances and dissensions will arise. I would pray that the bond of a blood-family would exist between my spiritual family and me so that we will be willing to overlook the little faults that arise and to remain loyal to one another, even through such things. May Your hand of wisdom be with us in this as we worship You in a true spirit of fellowship and love. Amen.

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 Corinthians 2:3

The first words, "And I wrote this very thing to you" could mean one of several things. It could be referring to his change in plans concerning his visit (1 Corinthians 16:7), it could mean the rebukes of his former epistle to expel the incestuous man, or it could even be that he is conveying the thought "I write" instead of "I wrote." If the last is correct, it is a form of communication known as an epistolary aorist. In essence, "What I write to you now has the very object of sparing you a painful visit" (Pulpit).

Whichever is correct, or even if he intends something different than any of these options, his writing was intended to smooth things over by letter prior to a visit. If he simply came and dictated what was necessary to be done, there would only be "sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy." In other words, "Instead of a happy gathering, there would only be sadness." This is what Paul was hoping to avoid by a painful visit.

By following this course of action, he felt that his letter would convey his "confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all." Stated differently if he maintained his joy, then they would be joyous over that. The intent was that there would be no unhappiness with them because he would come to them in joy.

Life application: It is true that there are times when a firm hand of discipline is required and that it should be done in person. However, if the same result can be obtained through a written letter and maintain harmony and fellowship between the two parties, isn't that a preferred option? Let us always consider how to maintain love and harmony, particularly in our relationships with other Christians.

Lord God, what a joy it is to wake up in Your presence each day. I arise, knowing You are there. I open Your word and You are there. The sun rises and I see Your hand in the perfection of its timing and the splendor of its beauty. As I go to work, You and I are in fellowship... thank You for that beautiful white cloud. And so it goes throughout the hours. Each step I take, I know that You are with me. Thank You for Your constant presence in my life. Amen.

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 Corinthians 2:4

In the previous verse, Paul noted that he had written to the Corinthians rather than visited them in order to avoid sorrow in the encounter. Now he shows them the level of

sorrow that he had already felt, simply by writing. He says that "out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you."

This shows the depth of the sorrow and pain that he possessed for needing to correct their faulty doctrine and tolerance of sin. He says he suffered "affliction." This is a strong word indicating "tribulation." It is used throughout the New Testament to indicate persecution or severe trials.

The word translated as "anguish" is *sunoché*. It is used only twice in the New Testament and conveys the idea of distress, anguish, or anxiety. Its only other use is in Luke 21:25, translated as "distress" -

"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring..."

This word, according to Albert Barnes, "means, properly, 'a holding together or shutting up'; and then, 'pressure, distress, anguish' - an affliction of the heart by which one feels tightened or constrained; such a pressure as great grief causes at the heart."

Understanding this, we can see the true depth of Paul's sorrow for the confrontation that was needed via his pen. It came through "many tears," but he notes to them that those tears were "not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you." Having conveyed these words to them, they should now understand the full weight of the words of the previous verse.

If he had come under such circumstances, already sorrowful to this extreme state, then when they were made sorrowful through the correction they needed, everyone would be sorrowful. There would be no one to comfort anyone else. Rather than such a difficult meeting, he felt it best that he would write, let them absorb his instruction, and then come to them at a later time.

Life application: Again, we can learn much from Paul's example. He had the best intent for the individual situation in mind. If a personal encounter would be unproductive or counter-productive, then he knew that a letter would instead be the better choice. Rushing into face-to-face discipline is not always the best means of handling a situation.

Lord, today I pray for wisdom in how I handle my interactions with others, especially when sadness or difficulties could arise from them. Help me to know when to call, when to write, and when to make a personal visit. And in whichever situation is needed, help

my words to be graceful and salted with only the truth. Give me courage in my convictions to never let doctrine be set aside for the sake of tolerance; something sorely needed in this world today. Thank You Lord. Amen!

But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. 2 Corinthians 2:5

The construction of this verse is such that it can have one of at least three varied meanings. Regardless of which it is that Paul intended to convey, the overarching thought is that there was an offense; there was grief involved in that offense - towards Paul and towards the church; and that therefore the entire church was affected.

The word "anyone" is singular and it is most probably referring to the unnamed individual in 1 Corinthians 5. He remains unnamed here. Paul had instructed the church to bring discipline against him due to his immoral actions which had caused this grief. That occurred and now there is no strong language against him here and there are no heavy-handed demands being made. Rather he is carefully and tenderly handling this situation concerning the unnamed offender to get it behind them.

The next six verses will continue to explain this and what should be done about it. The church had suffered and now the church needed to be healed of the matter without prolonging it any further.

Life application: Church discipline is detailed in the Bible, but the Bible also shows that if the measures of discipline are met, then reconciliation should be anticipated. Just as Christ forgives us of our offenses when we repent, so the church should act in a like manner towards offenders who repent as well.

Lord, help me to remember that even the person with the strongest faith can fall into temptation and sin. I certainly know I'm not immune from it and neither is anyone else. And so, help me to be wise in how I deal with a brother or sister who has made mistakes while walking with You. Help me to not overlook sin, but also to not over-charge someone for doing the same things I am prone to do. Let my heart be wise and discerning about such difficult matters as this. Amen.

This punishment which was *inflicted* by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 2 Corinthians 2:6

Explaining the source and now the intended correction of the matter which caused such grief, Paul brings up the actions that had been taken based on his epistle. If this is referring to the incident in 1 Corinthians 5 (as it most probably is) concerning a sexually immoral man, he had recommended the following -

"...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." 1 Corinthians 5:5

It appears the Corinthians took the action as recommended by Paul and it actually provided two intended purposes. The first is obvious. It was to serve punishment upon the offender in hopes of him turning from his immorality. In essence, it was intended to bring him back to a right fellowship with the Lord and the church. Secondly, it was to return purity to the church, both by expelling the impure man as well as to return purity to the hearts of the congregants who had allowed such immorality to occur without any repercussions.

Whether they took Paul's recommended course of action, or whether they modified it, such as a meeting informing him that this action would take place if he didn't comply (or whatever else may have occurred), the punishment worked. Because of this, Paul says, "This punishment which was *inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man."

The word translated as "punishment" is only found here in the New Testament. It is not a word which carries a heavy punitive penalty, such as an "eternal punishment." Rather, it is the word *epitimia*. It means "the *fitting* (appropriate) response necessary to *turn someone in the right direction*." And this is exactly what occurred. A hope of turning this man (and the congregation!) in the right direction was anticipated, and it is what came about. Because the remedy worked, Paul says that it was sufficient.

Life application: The intent of corrective punishment is to correct. The Bible says, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons" (Hebrews 12:7, 8). Should you face such chastening, count it as an honor that you are a child of God and a member of His church. This is especially true in today's world where sexual immorality is so prevalent in the "church" (which is no church at all). Such people prove that they are not children of God through their wicked actions.

Heavenly Father, there is the "church" and then there is the Church. In today's world, there is an ever-growing gap between the two. The vile immoral actions which are being

tolerated and even condoned in the visible church only prove that such people and congregations are not a part of Your true Church. Help me to be wise and discerning in where I attend, what I will tolerate, and when to move on from what is a no-church. It is so easy to put friendships and long-standing attendance above Your word. Help me to never make such an error, but to instead place You and Your word as my priority, above all else. Amen.

...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 Corinthians 2:7

Paul has been exceedingly comforting and delicate in his words towards the offender. He has not called him by his name and he has referred to him in a roundabout manner. For example, the word "him" in this verse isn't in the original, but is inserted by the translators for clarity. In the previous verse, he noted that the punishment which had been meted out by the majority was sufficient. It served its purpose and the man was reformed. However, what can be inferred is that he is not only reformed, but immensely sorrowful for having brought disgrace upon Christ, the fellowship, and himself.

Because of this, Paul says "on the contrary..." This is something like "on the other hand." In essence, "Instead of continuing his discipline, you should on the other hand now take a new direction." And this new direction is "rather to forgive and comfort *him*." Where there was discipline (possibly excommunication which was recommended by Paul) there should now be reconciliation. Where there was judgment, there should be forgiveness. And where there was upsetting the brother and the fellowship, there should now be comfort.

His reason for this action is clearly stated, "...lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow." The word translated as "swallowed" is used to indicate being totally consumed, as if gulping something down. It is used in Hebrews 11 to indicate the death of the Egyptians who pursued Israel -

"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned." Hebrews 11:29

Therefore, it is unclear if Paul was worried about him being so consumed with grief that he may simply walk away from the faith or even commit suicide. Whatever word had come to him concerning this man, he wanted it known that he held him in great concern and in great love.

Life application: It is apparent from this passage that church discipline is to be used to bring a person to a point of sorrow and repentance and then it is to be ended. To continue to discipline someone who has amended their ways can only end in harm towards that person.

Lord God, help me to be a forgiving person when restoration is sought. Help me to not carry grudges against those who have come and asked for making amends. It is so easy to let past differences or offenses linger on, but I know that You would want them ended. We have all walked contrary to You and yet You sent Your Son to reconcile us. For those who have called out to Him, You have forgiven the past and established a new, harmonious walk between the two. Help me to act in a like manner, especially considering that the offense of others against me is miniscule in comparison to my offenses against You. Help me in this. Amen.

Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him. 2 Corinthians 2:8

Having suffered punishment sufficient to bring repentance, Paul was concerned that the offender may arrive at a state of extreme sorrow where great harm may come to him. In hope of that not taking place, he urges those at Corinth "to reaffirm *your* love to him." By doing so, he would feel that he was fully brought back into the fold in good-standing.

The word for "reaffirm" here is *kuroo*. It is found only here and in Galatians 3:15. In Galatians, it is used when speaking of the establishment of a covenant -

"Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant, **yet if it is confirmed**, no one annuls or adds to it."

A covenant stands as it was agreed on. This seems to be the idea with the man who had been the offender in this situation. He was disciplined, but he was also a saved believer in the Lord. That would not change. All believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit when they believe (Ephesians 1:13, 14) and this is a guarantee which will not be broken. One result of this is that they are brought into the body of Christ. Though they may be disciplined, they are no less a part of that body. Paul is therefore asking them to receive him back as such after his discipline, just as Christ will receive him at His coming.

To do this, Paul uses this word *kuroo* to ask them to reaffirm his position in Christ. According to Thayer's, the intent here is that they were "to make a public decision that love be shown to a transgressor by granting him pardon." The man had been openly

rebuked and disciplined. Paul's words imply that he should be openly shown that he has been received again into the fold.

Life application: If the intent of discipline is realized, it is only proper to make a public display of reconciliation when a public display of discipline was meted out. Otherwise, there will seemingly be a greater importance placed upon the discipline than there is on the restoration.

Gracious God, I am so thankful for every blessing which You pour out on me day by day. Too often, I fail to recognize them as they come. Or I fail to thank You for them for whatever reason. But as I collectively think of all You have done for me, I know that every breath I take and every flower along the path was a gift that I participated in. The stream of goodness from You has never been anything but full and fulfilling. Thank You for each and every blessing which You pour out on me day by day! Amen.

For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 2 Corinthians 2:9

Greek scholars debate whether Paul is writing here about his first letter or this letter. The verb is in the aorist tense and so either is possible. If he is writing about his first letter, he indicates that the instructions for disciplining the man were included in that letter rather than him coming to the church personally to test the obedience of the Corinthians "in all things."

He had given them a directive to "put away from yourselves the evil person." By writing, he would then have been testing their obedience to his authority as an apostle, even when he was separate from them. In essence, it was a test of compliance to his directive. It is easy to be obedient when one in authority is present, but it is less so when that same authority is absent.

The second opinion is that he is using the tool known as an "epistolary aorist" in this verse which concerns this same letter. In essence, "For to this end I also write (this letter), that I might put you to the test (concerning forgiving the man who has been disciplined), whether you are obedient in all things (both in punishment and in restoration)."

In the end, the challenge is the same for the Corinthians: Will they be obedient to Paul's directive concerning a very sensitive issue even though Paul is not personally present. Whichever is the case, Paul was trusting in their faithfulness to his directives as an

apostle of Christ. As this letter has become a part of the Bible, the exact same premise carries over to each one of us.

His words are written under apostolic authority and thus carry the weight of having come directly from the Lord. Are we willing to accept his (and thus the Lord's) authority and be obedient to his prescriptive writings, or will we be disobedient to them? How easy it is to go to verses outside of Paul's writings in order to justify disobedience! But it is Paul who is the apostle to the Gentiles during this dispensation. Thus, it is his letters which set the standard for the church age. Let us be willing to accept them and be obedient to them.

Life application: The book of Acts is a descriptive account of the establishment of the church. It is not intended as a tool of instruction for the establishment of doctrine. Rather, Paul's words are given for that purpose. If something occurs in Acts which seems contrary to one of Paul's directives, there is a reason for it. The variation then is not for doctrinal use, but to show how the church was established. Once it was, we are to prefer Paul's commands over the narrative found in Acts. Taking everything in its intended context will keep the congregation from confusion and faulty doctrine.

Heavenly Father, I have come to realize that the world speaks about "God" in such general terms as relationships, expectations, and hopes. And yet they are just individual preferences without anything to back them up. They have created a "god" in their image rather than searching You out as You have revealed Yourself to us in Your word. Help me to be wise and discerning and never to make up my own "god" in Your place. Reveal Yourself to me through Your word and only when ideas about You match it will I accept them as valid. Let me be obedient only to the truth of who You are. Amen.

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 Corinthians 2:10

Paul is speaking in a rather general way here concerning forgiveness of an offender. Though it is vague and roundabout, he is certainly referring to the person mentioned in verses 3-8. In other words, the general principle can be applied to the specific individual. He is affirming the right of the congregation to forgive an offense and that he will, in turn, support their decision. In essence, he is saying, "I have confidence in you to make the right decision in such cases and I am supportive of your decision when it is made."

To shore up this thought he adds, "For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes." His words are in the past tense, stating as an accomplished

decision his support for what was or will be decided upon by the church; it was for their sake that his forgiveness was granted. He is showing solidarity with them in what they have resolved concerning the matter.

To finish his thought, he adds that it was "in the presence of Christ." The Greek literally reads, "...in the face of Christ." It is as if Christ was literally present and watching what occurred. His words then are intended for those in Corinth to understand that, "I have acted with Christ watching me, to whom I am accountable."

The whole verse speaks of a process which is intended to bring reconciliation, ensure harmony, and yet uphold the strictest standards of integrity, knowing that the Lord has His eyes on the situation.

Life application: One aspect of Christian life that should be remembered is that we are in the presence of the Lord at all times. Our words, our actions, our interactions, etc. are all known to Him. Some day we will stand before Him and give an account of our lives. Judgment is coming, so let us act as if we believe it now. But the good news is that our judgment in Christ is not for salvation or condemnation, but for rewards and losses. Let us work for the former so we do not receive the latter!

Lord God, I am so grateful that the judgment I will face is not one for salvation or condemnation, but only for rewards and losses. Because of having received Christ, my salvation is secure. Now Lord, give me the wisdom to work for rewards, shun that which would end in loss, and do all of it for Your glory. Thank You for Jesus who has made all of this possible! Thank You for the cross and the shed blood of the Lamb. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.

...lest Satan should take advantage of us; 2 Corinthians 2:11

Paul has been addressing forgiveness and now he gives a very important reason for it - "... lest Satan should take advantage of us." Here he gives the devil's proper name, Satan. It means "an adversary," "an accuser," or "an enemy." The devil (Satan) is this adversary, accuser, and enemy of both God and man. Paul had first recommended that the Corinthians "...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5). However, because of the circumstances, he was now taking the avenue of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This path is taken so "lest Satan should take advantage of us." The verb for "take advantage of" indicates to "overreach." In essence, it is "a game against the Tempter, in

which the souls of men are at once the counters and the stake" (Ellicott). A spiritual match of wits and strategy was being waged and Paul wanted to ensure that the devil would not succeed in his efforts to harm the souls of either the man in particular or the congregation in general.

His reason for this is given, "...for we are not ignorant of his devices." Paul had a great amount of experience in waging this battle against the devil. In Ephesians 6, he writes concerning the spiritual warfare around us and specifically "the wiles of the devil" in verse 11. He also notes later in this letter that "a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan" (2 Corinthians 12:7). In writing to the Thessalonians, he notes that Satan actually hindered his way in visiting them.

In these and other instances, it is apparent that Paul knew well that Satan is a powerful adversary and that he needed to stay ahead of him always.

Life application: The spiritual battle is real and we need to be aware of it. Keeping in the word, staying close to God in prayer, and remaining united to other believers in close fellowship are all ways that this battle can be effectively handled and won.

Lord, I know that the devil is a real adversary and that he has his schemes set to bring down any one of us at just the right moment. Help me Lord to be strong in You and to stay close to You through Your word, through prayer, and through fellowship with other believers. I know that only in this way will I be able to stand against his work. Help my morals to be upright, my tongue to be pure, and my heart to be soft toward righteousness that I might not sin against You. Amen.

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 2 Corinthians 2:12

Paul now returns to the sequence of events that he left off with in verse 4. Verses 5-11 were an insert thought which has now been completed. He had determined to not go directly to Corinth for the reasons previously stated. On his journey to Macedonia, he came to Troas, which was on the route between Ephesus and Macedonia.

On the way he says "when I came to Troas." There is an article in front of "Troas" which leads scholars to think he is referring to the general area and not specifically the city. There in that area, he notes that concerning Christ's gospel, "a door was opened to me by the Lord."

This terminology is quite similar to the words he used concerning Ephesus in 1 Corinthians 16:8, 9 -

"But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. ⁹ For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries."

As this journey was from Ephesus to Macedonia via Troas, it becomes apparent through his use of this same term in such close intervals that the Lord was carefully directing his steps for the furtherance of His gospel. In this, we can see that even the anguish of the situation at Corinth was used to further the gospel elsewhere. Nothing happens by chance and all things are being directed by the infinitely wise Lord.

Despite this, there will be a conflict in Paul that will cause a change of plans in his work in Troas. This will be seen in the coming verse.

Life application: At those times when it seems that the Lord isn't there with you, He is. He may be working on something entirely unexpected by you, so trust that He truly will never leave you nor forsake you.

Lord, how many times have I thought You weren't there with me as I faced some difficulty or trial. And yet, when I got through it, I saw that You were there working it out and accomplishing other marvelous things at the same time. How faithless I was to think I had been abandoned! Help me to remember this when the next trial or difficulty comes along. Don't let me forget that You are with me. Instead, help me to wisely look for Your hand in the events as they unfold. Amen!

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 Corinthians 2:13

In the previous verse, Paul mentioned his arrival in Troas for the purpose of transmitting the gospel. While there he noted that "a door was opened to me by the Lord." However, and despite this, he says he "had no rest" in his spirit. The thing that usually brought him the greatest joy was telling others the news of Christ. He worked tirelessly in this and took every advantage of it. And yet, even with a door wide open before him to walk through and share the news, he was in anguish to hear about the state of affairs at Corinth.

He then notes the reason behind the anguish. It was "because I did not find Titus my brother." It is apparent that the two had intended to meet up and either he was late in

arriving, Titus was late in arriving, or circumstances had changed Titus' original plans. It was Titus who would carry news about the affairs at Corinth, but for whatever reason, he now had no way of hearing how things had transpired there. And so he left this great field of harvest at Troas to hopefully find Titus in Macedonia.

The entire thought is one which shows the immense care that Paul felt for this church which he was so closely tied to. It was a burden that he felt for all of his children-churches, so much so that he almost couldn't endure not knowing how they were faring in their lives and doctrine. The same general sentiment that is expressed now towards Corinth is also seen in his first letter to the Thessalonians -

"For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain."

-1 Thessalonians 3:5

We are shown in these letters of Paul that sometimes correcting doctrine of current believers is to be considered on the same level as evangelizing new ones. The importance of correct doctrine for believers is because if they get off course, then those whom they evangelize will never come to know the truth of the gospel message. Paul felt this burden in the most intense way.

Life application: There are only so many hours in a day and there are only so many avenues we can pursue with this small amount of time we have been given. Let us make sound choices as to where we will focus our attention, redeeming the time as best we can.

Lord, I know that there are only so many hours in a day. How will I use them to most effectively serve You? Help me to be wise and discerning about events as they unfold before me and to prioritize them to be the most advantageous for Your kingdom. Let me not be slack in my efforts to bring the good news to those around me and to minister to those who reach out concerning whatever needs they face. I guess what I am asking Lord is for You to direct my steps according to Your wisdom and not mine. Amen.

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 Corinthians 2:14

Paul, in what is not uncommon in his writings, breaks into a shout of joy as he considers the situation. He lets out a resounding "Now thanks be to God." This is based on several key points which came to a confluence in his life at the same time.

First, he had finally met up with Titus. Second, because he had heard the good news from Titus about the positive status of the Corinthian church. And third, he was overwhelmed with the great abundance that came about from his visit to the Macedonian churches concerning a gift for the church in Jerusalem. These points won't be seen until chapters 7 and 8, but Paul hints on them now before addressing many important issues. He will return to these thoughts though and give them in detail at that time.

For these things, he sent his thanks "to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ." The word for "leads us in triumph" is *thriambeúō*. It is used only one other time in the NT, in Colossians 2:15 and it means "properly, to display triumph openly; publically exalting the victor who leads a victory-procession – and putting the conquered on display."

Scholars and translators vary on how to render this. It could either be something like "causes us to triumph in Christ," or "leads us in triumph in Christ." The two are vastly different and yet either could be deduced from the surrounding text. However, the fact that the surrounding issues were handled by the Lord, even directed by Him, it would make sense to say that it is He who leads us in triumph. Because of this, it is He who "through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge and power in every place."

As He leads us in triumph, our lives are used to diffuse what we know of Him to others. The idea of "fragrance" is used by Paul elsewhere to indicate the offering of Christ Himself for us (Ephesians 5:2) and of a gift that was sent to Paul (Philippians 4:18). The intent of this "fragrance" is that it permeates all things and is pleasing in and of itself. Therefore, like incense, the "knowledge and power" of Christ is diffused through the disciples of Christ to the glory of God.

Life application: Paul takes time to weave the difficulties of his life into larger pictures of God's obvious hand in them by bringing them together not for greater difficulty, but for overall benefit. If we can overlook the small difficulties in our lives and see how they all actually turn out for a greater benefit, then we can truly rest in the fact that God has it all under control. Let us learn from the Bible that there is a good end and God is working towards it, even through our failings, faults, and trials.

Heavenly Father, it is more than wonderful to know that the times of trial and difficulty I face are actually being used for a good end. I can look at the lives of great men like Abraham, Joseph, David, and Paul and I can see that even though they faced immense trials, each was a part of a greater whole which was being used for a very good end. As

this is so with them, and as I am Your child through faith in Jesus, then it must be true with me too. Thank You for this certain knowledge as I face the times of trial which come my way! Amen.

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 2 Corinthians 2:15

In the previous verse, Paul spoke of himself and the other ministers of Christ saying that He "...as through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Building upon that, he now states that "we are to God the fragrance of Christ." Their ministry is what diffuses "the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." God has chosen to use fallible humans to carry the infallible message of His Son to the people of the world.

In this, the fragrance goes forth as God purposes. The imagery is that of the streets of Rome after a triumph had been realized for the empire. The air would be filled with the fragrance of incense as the victors proceeded through the streets. However, there is another part of the scene that the world saw. Not only would the victors walk in their uniforms with their heads held high, but following them would be the vanquished foes. They would be captives taken as slaves or for display in the Coliseum where they would be put to death. The same fragrance would go forth to both, but the effect upon them would be completely different in its reception.

This fragrance of Christ then diffuses "among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." In Paul's words is an inescapable truth. Some will be saved and some will perish. The gospel is the standard by which this will come about. Those who receive Christ will be the victors and to them the sweet fragrance is that of life and salvation. Those who reject Christ will be the vanquished. Among them that sweet fragrance will be a testimony against them that death, banishment from the presence of God, and eternal punishment will be the result.

Life application: In today's pluralistic world, people teach that there are many ways to God and that salvation can mean a host of things. Instead of following what God has said in His word, they make stuff up that sounds good and they run with it. But such a message has no true pleasing fragrance. The incense has been tainted with untruth and it only carries the smell of death. There is but one way to be saved - through Jesus Christ, and that salvation carries with it an ultimate truth - reconciliation with God by the putting away of sin. There is no other way, so accept the gospel, be saved, and be a victor through the work of Christ.

Heavenly Father, Your word says that there is but one way to be reconciled to You. Apart from receiving Jesus Christ, no person can be saved. I believe this message and it is my desire to continue to proclaim it, even to death itself. Governments or false religions can take my life, but they can never exterminate my faith in Jesus Christ. I stand on the gospel because it is the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. Amen.

To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? 2 Corinthians 2:16

Paul just noted that the apostles (meaning the message they carried) are "to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." Expanding on that, he gives a contrast as to how this fragrance is received. He says that, "To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death." In Greek, it reads *ek thanatou eis thanaton* - "from death to death."

The state of the unregenerate is already death. This is because "the wages of sin is death" and "all have sinned." Those who reject the gospel message do so from death to death. There can be no life for someone who is already dead and who has chosen the path of death by rejecting Christ. Therefore, Paul equates the fragrant message of Christ as the aroma which a prisoner headed to death would smell. As Vincent's Word Studies notes -

"Some find here an allusion to a revolting feature of the Roman triumph. Just as the procession was ascending the Capitoline Hill, some of the captive chiefs were taken into the adjoining prison and put to death. "Thus the sweet odors which to the victor - a Marius or a Julius Caesar - and to the spectators were a symbol of glory and success and happiness, were to the wretched victims - a Jugurtha or a Vercingetorix - an odor of death" (Farrar)."

This same type of terminology has been noted among the rabbis as well. It is obviously a universally understood concept then. People of all cultures know that death is the end. Most cultures believe in an afterlife that must somehow be merited. Therefore, if the way of merit is not attained, then there is only death leading to death. Thankfully for the Christian, there is an absolute assurance which is found nowhere else. It is "to the other the aroma of life leading to life."

For the one who reaches out and receives the fragrant aroma of the gospel message, it is *ek zoes eis zoen* - "from life to life." The Source of life is found in the gospel message

which centers on Jesus Christ. When that life is received in an animated being, he moves to the life which is true life. The spiritual reconnection to God is made and eternal life is granted. It is more than a hope, but it is rather a certain, present, and guaranteed reality.

Paul finishes the verse with the sobering words, "And who *is* sufficient for these things?" He asks this rhetorically as a way of showing the immense responsibility laid upon the one who shares the gospel message. It is a two-edged sword which will lead some to life and some to death. The words when transmitted will lead to either eternal life or eternal damnation. Who would take such a responsibility lightly? Who would even be willing to speak such words, knowing what the result *could* be? Paul implies here that it is the grace of God alone which enabled him to pronounce the eternal destiny-deciding words.

Life application: We have all been asked to share the message of Christ, either in word or in action. As our lives are to be a gospel message in and of themselves, let us walk soberly and consider that when we fail to responsibly reflect Christ to others, it may be to them the fragrance of death leading to death. How great is our responsibility then!

Heavenly Father, others are evaluating a relationship with Christ based on my actions. Should I present myself other than a faithful, trustworthy, and fully dedicated follower of You, then I may be the very reason that they never receive Jesus as their Savior. If this is the case, then how terrifying a thing will then occur? They will have gone from death leading to death because of my irresponsible actions. Help me to live my life and calling in a manner which would be above such an occurrence. Help me in this O God. Amen.

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 Corinthians 2:17

Paul's words in this verse reflect a horrifying truth concerning false teachers; they were present even at this extremely early point in church history. He has to actually contrast himself to them because of their numbers which are *hoi polloi* - "the many." In other words, the majority of those proclaiming the word of God were hucksters. It should be noted though that this could be anyone proclaiming portions of the Jewish canon because this was "the word of God" at that time. The New Testament didn't yet exist.

Therefore, they could intentionally be proclaiming Christ incorrectly, proclaiming a false Christ, or they could otherwise be engaged in some misuse of the Scriptures which existed. And the reason for this type of misuse of Scripture was because there was profit

in it. They were "peddling the word of God" The word used here is *kapéleuó*. It is found only here in the New Testament and it means "properly, to act as an unscrupulous merchant, i.e., 'a huckster' who profits by 'peddling the Word of God' for personal gain."

Involvement in religion has always been an easy way to benefit off of others. If someone is an eloquent orator, a smart businessman, or a cunning deceiver, he can make a great deal off a religious presentation. This is because a desire to know more about such things is instilled in all of us. If the right buttons are pushed, the cash will generally flow out from the target with ease.

However, there is a contrast to this which is teaching the word of God out of "sincerity." Paul notes that this was the intent of himself and those with him. They determined to teach "as from God." This means of teaching is often far less rewarding from a monetary standpoint because it involves an effort in thinking that most don't want to engage in. Proper theology is actually hard work for an individual to assimilate. Most people would rather be taught what to believe and then follow through with that belief regardless of its truth because it is easier to swallow and often goes down smoothly.

Paul wanted nothing of this. Instead, he said that "we speak in the sight of God in Christ." He knew to whom he was accountable and he feared what not speaking the truth meant. Others, lacking a fear in the true God, said what tickles the ear because it was easy, profitable, and bore the ability to wield control over others. Paul, being "in Christ," rather determined to preach the truth of God in a sincere fashion, knowing that there was a greater reward ahead for both himself and for those whom he instructed.

Life application: Unfortunately, great orators often gain large audiences regardless whether they actually teach the word of God in truth or not. If they sound authoritative, they can pretty much say anything and reap a great harvest of very poor grain. It is up to each person to be discerning and to study and show himself approved concerning what is assimilated into his repository of accumulated theology.

Heavenly Father, it seems that too many preachers have found a niche in the world through great oration, flashy presentation, or charming manners. And yet, an evaluation of what they say to the people leaves much to be desired in the area of sincerity concerning Your word. It breaks my heart to see people follow after untruths which sound good, but which are incorrect. And so, Lord, I would ask You to open the minds and hearts of Your people to be diligent in checking what they hear and sticking closely to what You have laid out for us in Your superior word. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you? 2 Corinthians 3:1

Understanding this verse requires understanding the context. Paul is rhetorically responding to an objection that might be laid against him. On the surface the preceding verses might seem to show that he was almost bragging about his efforts and the efforts of those who were with him -

"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. ¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ 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."

To quell the notion that these statements were somehow boasting, he redirects their thoughts with these questions. "Do we begin again to commend ourselves?" In essence, "Is what I have just said an attempt to exalt us and show our superior ministry?" "Have I written this to obtain your approval?" Based on the rhetorical nature of the question the answer must be, "No." And he continues, "Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you?"

Again, it is a rhetorical question. "Epistles of commendation" were used to establish authority for someone who was visiting another location. If someone showed up at a synagogue or a church representing someone else, they would carry a letter to prove that they had the authority or respect of the person they were representing. This is found in Acts 9 when Paul was sent to harass the Christians in Damascus –

"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." Acts 9:1, 2

Likewise, in Acts 15:23-29, a letter of doctrine was issued by the ruling council in Jerusalem which specifically mentioned Paul and Barnabas as "chosen men." Such a letter then granted them the authority to speak for the ones who sent them. They were

letters of validation. Paul wanted to know if such a letter was needed either from others to establish his authority in Corinth or from the Corinthians in order to acknowledge his deeds and authority based on his ministry at Corinth. Again, the obvious answer is, "No." He will give an explanation of why in the verses to come.

Life application: Sometimes it is necessary to obtain solid evidence that someone has the right and authority to minister in spiritual matters. We wouldn't want to trust someone who just walked into a church with a youth ministry without knowing his background. However, there are times when actions are sufficient to establish authority. This may take a long time, but eventually a person might be known by the conduct of their lives. If so, then no such external evidence would be needed.

Lord, I need to keep reminding myself that everything I do and say is a reflection on You. As I am Yours, I am responsible to You. And so, I pray that You would just keep me from bringing discredit upon Your name. And yet, at the same time, I would ask that You give me the firm resolve to stand on Your word, even if others misperceive my conduct. I am accountable to You, not to them. Help me to never let adherence to Your word be put aside in order to be pleasing to everyone around me. Amen.

You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 2 Corinthians 3:2

In response to the rhetorical questions of the previous verse, Paul now gives a very heartwarming description of the true state of things. Instead of a written letter of commendation which is carried in the hand, he tells them that their church is "our epistle written on our hearts." Whereas a written letter can be forged, lost, or simply discarded, the writing upon the heart is true, permanent, and is always present for all to see.

Paul uses the same terminology in Romans concerning the Law of Moses and the inner law. One was written and recorded by Moses on tablets of stone, the other on the heart. The one on the heart is actually more permanent and more effectual than the other -

"...for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) ¹⁶ in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."

-Romans 2:14-16

Likewise, the testimony of the founding of the church, the caring for the brethren, the love shared between the believers, etc., are all an epistle which is written on the heart, "known and read by all men." It is a permanent epistle in the heart of all who see it. The fact that a church exists demonstrates that it is there because of a definite purpose. A written letter could never provide such sure evidence.

The terms "known and read" are a play on words from the Greek words *ginōskomenē* and *anaginōskomenē*. A similar word play was found in 2 Corinthians 1:13 which said -

"For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end..."

With the church standing as a unit and growing in Christ any can read and understand its status, more surely than if it were an epistle written on paper.

Life application: When others look at the church you attend, how will they perceive it? Is it one which stands on the word of God? Are the principles of the faith firmly fixed in the minds and hearts of the people? Do the congregants show love toward one another? It matters far less what the church website or brochure says than what the personal, human perceptions of the church actually read. Be sure that when others see your church, they see a true and godly epistle, written on the hearts of all.

Heavenly Father, it matters much less what the church website says about the church than what the church shows about itself. Brochures handed out concerning the fellowship can never replace the impression that a personal visit displays. Lord God, I would pray that the church I attend always shows the greatest respect for, and adherence to, Your word; that our doctrine would be pure and undefiled; and that true love of You and the brotherhood would be evident to all. I know that this is much more important than a flashy light show, great music, and free coffee at the door. Let us represent You in spirit and in truth. Amen.

...clearly you are 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. 2 Corinthians 3:3

Paul continues with his thought of the church at Corinth as being an actual "epistle of Christ." Instead of needing letters of commendation to or from the Corinthians, they themselves are such a letter - evident to all. The word "clearly" gives the sense of this

being an obvious truth. And so, the epistle is a stamp of the authenticity of the apostleship of those who worked with and for them - as he says, "...ministered by us."

His words here could be likened to a carpenter who makes fine furniture. Such a carpenter doesn't need a letter telling anyone how good his work is because the finished product speaks for itself. Each chair or table is a letter of commendation. Likewise, Stradivarius' violins are a testimony to the work of the master himself. Such examples help us to see what Paul is referring to.

And this special epistle, which is the church at Corinth, doesn't need the usual implements of a letter. It is "written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God." Here Paul goes to concepts found in Scripture itself to demonstrate his point.

The "Spirit of the living God" is found to replace the "finger of God" which wrote out the Ten Commandments in Exodus 31:18. This same concept was used by Jesus in Luke 11 and elsewhere. In Luke we read this -

"And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." Luke 11:19, 20

This is explained further by Jesus in Matthew 12:28 -

"But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."

The tangible concept of God's finger represents the force behind it - the Spirit of God. Continuing with this, he notes that the writing is "not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart." Again, this is recalling the physical tablets of the Ten Commandments and is then being contrasted to the "tablets of flesh." This is something that was promised in the book of Ezekiel to the Jewish people -

"Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God." Ezekiel 11:19, 20

This promise is further spoken of in Jeremiah when the Lord promised a New Covenant to the people -

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. ³³ But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

-Jeremiah 31:31-33

Paul is showing that these promises to Israel are realized in the church. Until the time when the message is accepted by the Jewish people, it has been granted to the Gentiles through the work of Paul. In every way, Paul is hinting at the superiority of the New Covenant over that of the Old Covenant. Further, he is showing that these promises apply not just to Israel, but to the nations of the world. It is a marvelous thing which God has done.

Life application: A true church is actually an epistle to those who see it. It therefore has the power to change lives as people read the actions of the congregants and then decide if what they are inspecting is worth joining. May our actions in our respective churches be such that those who read our "epistle" want to be a part of it as well.

Glorious God, You have established the New Covenant through the blood of Christ. Now the people of God have Your testimony written on their hearts of flesh rather than on tablets of stone. Your prophets of old said this would happen and that it would be for the people of Israel. Until that day, the nations have received this blessing. It looks like those times are ending and the attention is back on Israel. I pray that they will see the truth of their Messiah soon. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

And we have such trust through Christ toward God. 2 Corinthians 3:4

Paul and those with him relied on the "epistle" which is the church itself to be the sure proof of their ministry. To him, it was enough to know that their ministry was in fact appointed by God and accepted by God. And this was despite their many failings and points of error in doctrine which he had addressed and which he will continue to address.

Because of this trust, there was no need for any other external proofs, such as letters of commendation. They alone as a body of believers were sufficient for the sure testimony of their hard work. And this sure trust is "through Christ." In reading Paul's many letters,

it is apparent through and through that he never considered his own efforts to be what made the difference in the result of his labors. Instead, it was Christ working through him, directing him, and guiding him to obtain the much-needed results of an effective "living epistle" which were the churches established and built up by his ministry. One example of many which Paul writes is found in Ephesians 4 -

"And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..." Ephesians 4:11, 12

It is Christ who gives "for the equipping of" the many various tasks of which the church is engaged. Finally, it is "through Christ toward God" that this occurs. The idea of "toward God" is that the surety that was felt was related to God. It was a confidence that their works were appointed by Him, established by Him, and conducted in them by Him. Further, it is implied that any continuance of their works in Christ would be toward God. Paul's words are a marvelous reflection of his confidence that everything was of Him, by Him, and for Him.

Life application: Either a church is built on Christ (meaning the Christ of the Bible) and whose confidence is in God's efforts in the conduct of the church, or it is not really a church at all. Far too many churches today bear the name of Christ, but they have no true trust in Christ toward God. In essence, they meet to "play church," but there is no ultimate uniting with God in their meeting.

Heavenly Father, I know that there is one true church which is comprised of Your faithful people. Among them, there are groups of people who meet to honor and exalt You and there are others who meet in utter disobedience to Your word. Keep me from any gathering that does not rely on the precepts of the Bible which reveal Your will for right conduct, holy living, and the glorifying of You. Lead my steps to gatherings that will place You above all else. Thank You for directing me according to Your wisdom. Amen.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, 2 Corinthians 3:5

Paul just noted in the previous verse that "...we have such trust through Christ toward God." He admitted that the trust was "through Christ," but possibly fearing that this expression wasn't to be fully understood, he expands upon it now. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves" is stating that even the trust they have ultimately comes from God. If we have trust in the things of God, then they must be from God. One cannot

trust in what one does not believe in! This sufficiency from God excludes thinking "of anything as *being* from ourselves."

In all things related to faith, God must be the Source. Our faith, our hope, our trust, our reason for working, etc., all stem from God. Nothing that we possess in our faith can logically stem from ourselves. This does not mean that we don't have free will, but that the free will we exercise stems from God as well. He is the Source of all things. One difference between a mature believer and those who are either weak in their faith, or who have no faith, is that they have come to the understanding that all things are from, for, and to God. He is absolutely sovereign and we are living within the confines of His sovereign works over and through creation.

Therefore, with this understanding, Paul completes the thought by acknowledging just that. He says, "...but our sufficiency *is* from God." His conversion was from God. His growth in Christ was from God. His communicating to others the gospel (which is from God) and their reception of it is from God. If we as believers can truly accept this fact, then we stand in a very good spot in relation to Him. In the end, there should be no fear of failure, no fear of man, and no worry about the day ahead. God is directing all things according to His wisdom. We are to engage our feet with this thought in mind. Let us head out each day knowing that the Lord is already aware of all that will transpire and He is directing our steps according to that plan.

Life application: The life you have is a gift from the Lord and is to be used for the Lord. Use it to His glory and don't fret about the path you are on. He is there with you, and He will be there at the end waiting for you.

Heavenly Father, I am so content to know that You are the source of all of who I am. My sufficiency is not from myself, but from You. I have no need to worry if I am not in the right spot according to Your plan... I must be; it is Your plan! Therefore, I know that You are directing my steps for Your good purposes. Help me to engage my feet with confidence that You are there with me as I walk and that You will be there at the end of the path with open arms. I have received Jesus... of course I am in the right place according to Your wisdom. Amen.

...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. 2 Corinthians 3:6

Paul shows here that the sufficiency of his ministry came from God "who also made us sufficient ministers of the new covenant." From beginning to end, his work was enabled

and carried through because of the work of God. And there is an end-purpose to it that God is working towards. It is in these duties, ministering to the new covenant, that they have been so enabled to work.

This new covenant is then contrasted to the old covenant through Paul's continued words. He says, "...not of the letter but of the Spirit." The Mosaic Law came in writing by the hand of God and carried with it the full force and effect of consequences for violating its precepts. Instead, the new covenant in Christ's blood is received by hearing and believing. Upon belief the person is sealed with the Spirit. It is an accomplished fact at that point.

The difference between the two is then explicitly stated in Paul's next words - "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Paul explains this in detail in Romans. But a good summary set of verses is found in Chapter 7 -

"I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. ¹⁰ And the commandment, which *was* to *bring* life, I found to *bring* death. ¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed *me*." Romans 7:9-11

And as an object lesson of the severity of the law in contrast to the life-giving power of the new covenant, God reveals these two examples from biblical history -

"Now when Moses saw that the people *were* unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies), ²⁶ then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever *is* on the LORD's side—*come* to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. ²⁷ And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" ²⁸ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day." Exodus 32:25-28

"And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. ⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Acts 2:40-42

At the time of the giving of the law, 3000 people perished due to disobedience of the law. At the time of the giving of the Spirit, 3000 people were saved due to reception of the word of life! It is an object lesson in and of itself concerning the superiority of the giving of the Spirit over the giving of the written code of the Mosaic Law.

The contrast in this verse is between the entire body of law given at Sinai and the giving of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem at Pentecost. We now also have written guidelines with the completion of the New Testament, but its application is based on the work of the Spirit after salvation. It is He who saves us and then we learn the details of this new life in Christ. In contrast, the Old Testament simply brought death through the revival of sin.

Life application: We are saved by grace through faith. That is a very simple concept which is often turned into a convoluted system of working towards salvation by uninformed or outright false teachers. To say that works are required to save us or to keep us saved is to say that what Christ did was insufficient for our salvation. May we never be so presumptuous!

Lord God, at the giving of the Law of Moses, three thousand people perished. At the reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, three thousand people were saved. The contrast is clear concerning the superiority of the New over the Old. For me, I choose life; I choose salvation; I choose Jesus! Thank You for such obvious examples in Scripture which confirm Your hand in redemptive history - all leading to the wonder of understanding salvation by grace through faith. Marvelous! Amen.

But if the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away, 2 Corinthians 3:7

In the previous verse Paul noted that "the letter kills." Now he uses that thought to convey an idea concerning the surpassing glory of the gospel. But first he must show how glorious even the Law of Moses was. This law, "the ministry of death," was "written and engraved on stones." The Greek literally reads, "Engraved on stones by means of letters."

This document, the Ten Commandments, was representative of the whole Law of Moses. And it bore a glory that was so amazing that its effects are specifically recorded for us to remember. The account is in Exodus 34:29-35. In short, Paul explains that it was so glorious "that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away."

The radiation of the glory of God emanated from Moses after he beheld the Divine glory. This was a part of his ministry as the lawgiver to the people. It showed the splendor of what God was doing in the giving of and tending to the law through Moses. And yet, Paul's words show that this amazing glory which caused this supernatural emanation of light from the face of Moses "was passing away."

In other words, the law which was given through Moses is being equated with the passing away of the glory of the light emanating from Moses. There would be a time when the law would fade into history, being replaced with something even more glorious. He will explain this in the verses ahead.

Life application: If the glory of God was associated with the giving of the old covenant which was intended to end at the coming of Christ, then how much greater must be the glory in the giving of the new. Let us never presume to return to the Law which has now faded away. Instead, let us proceed onward in the grace of Jesus Christ, adhering to the new covenant which is sealed in His precious blood.

Lord God, You have shown us in the Old Testament how glorious the giving of the Law of Moses was, such that Moses himself radiated that glory. And yet, you have shown us that it was a glory which was passing away. In its place You granted us a new covenant with a glory which is a surpassing glory. Help us to live in this covenant of grace, never turning from it to reinsert that which has passed. Give us wisdom in this, O Lord. Amen.

...how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 2 Corinthians 3:8

What a wonderful, even amazing sentiment! Paul has spoken of the glory of the "ministry of death" (meaning the Law of Moses) which is fading away. In an argument from the lesser to the greater he now basically asks, "If that was so glorious, then how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?"

Note how he does not call it the "ministry of life" in contrast to the "ministry of death." Instead, he calls it the "ministry of the Spirit." This Spirit, meaning the Holy Spirit, is life and so the contrast is made instead to the physical, tangible stone with carved letters. Because of the use of "the Spirit" in place of the law, it is speaking of the entire process of the transmission of the gospel - the work at Pentecost, His influence on the apostles to include their work and their writings which are now the New Testament, and then the continued preaching and evaluation of that word. This, and so much more, is the "ministry of the Spirit."

It is this which is more glorious, and it is this which will reveal glories ahead. This is seen in the use of the preposition *en* which denotes the permanent nature of the glory, and then the verb translated as "will be," which is in the future tense. It shows that what is yet to be revealed contains surpassing glory. Everything about the new surpasses the old, both in the present and in what is yet to be revealed.

Life application: At times, it may seem that our work in the church is not getting anywhere or that the rewards for our efforts just don't seem to carry a great deal of glory. But this is because we are looking at the present and comparing it to the present. If we can remember that everything we do, every dollar we give, and every prayer for the lost that is realized... all of this carries an eternal glory which is at this time beyond our imagination. Each person who is brought into salvation through Jesus Christ has an eternity of joy in store for them. Let us not forget this as we continue to work for the expansion of the church.

Glorious God Almighty, You have set before us a challenge to strive to the fullest in spreading the gospel message to the world. Help us to take full advantage of this and to never feel that what we are doing isn't of the greatest value. Every dollar given, every prayer which is heard by You for the lost, and every time the message of Jesus is spoken, it has the ability to bring Your surpassing glory to another person; a glory which will never fade, even unto eternity. Help us to consider and remember this. Amen.

For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. 2 Corinthians 3:9

Paul builds upon the previous verse where he noted the glory of the countenance of Moses, even though his ministry was one of death and which was merely written on stones. In contrast to this is the ministry of Christ which leads to life and which is written on our hearts. But having noted glory associated with the ministry of death, that of the shining countenance of Moses' face, then logically how much more glorious will be that which supersedes it!

In this verse, Paul changes the terms from "the ministry of death" to "the ministry of condemnation," and from "the ministry of the Spirit" to "the ministry of righteousness." In other words, the law brought death and associated with that death is condemnation; it is ineffectual to save anyone. However, the Spirit brings life and with that comes righteousness; it is not only sufficient to quicken the spirit to live, but to also grant Christ's righteousness to the one who is so quickened. Paul speaks of the same things in Romans 5 -

"Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment came* to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." Romans 5:18, 19

The glory of this ministry of righteousness far exceeds the glory of the law. The law faded away, but the work of Christ will endure for all eternity. The glory of Christ will shine upon His redeemed throughout the ages of ages.

Life application: The Law of Moses is one of the most studied and cherished writings in all of human history. However, its intent, like all of Scripture, was to lead us to Christ. It is not an end in and of itself. Rather we are to use it to understand our great need for a righteousness which is not our own; a righteousness found only in the work of Christ being imputed to us through faith.

Heavenly Father, one lesson of the entire Old Testament can be summed up in the thought "man fails." Even with all of the guidelines given to us, we find that we actually just fail more. This makes the wonder of Jesus even more spectacular. We fail; He prevailed. We deserve death; He gives life. Instead of exile and punishment, we receive nearness and love. Thank You for the lessons of the Old and the comforts of the New! Thank You for Your superior word which shows us that "Jesus prevails" and in Him we are secure! Hallelujah and Amen.

For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. 2 Corinthians 3:10

This particular verse is based on the reading of the Greek version of Old Testament passages found in Exodus 34 (Exodus 34:29 & Exodus 34:35). Paul, using that idea concerning the glory of the situation at that time, says that it actually cannot be compared to "the glory that excels."

The giving of the law was glorious. It was glorious in the display at its giving. It was glorious in the contents of the law which it revealed. It was glorious in how that law was ministered throughout the time of Israel's life under it as well. And yet, it was a ministry of death. It showed that man cannot fulfill its requirements and thus only brought condemnation. The only thing that spared men from this was a grant of mercy based on the Day of Atonement rituals.

However, the covenant which came through the work of Jesus is a ministry of life. It excels in that where the law brought death, it brings life. Where the law brought condemnation, it brings salvation. Where the law was written on stone, it is written on the hearts. In Jesus, there is full pardon of sin. In Jesus, there is the sure hope of restoration with God. In Jesus, there is the prospect of eternal life. In all ways, the glory of the law is shown to have no glory compared to the work of Jesus on our behalf.

Life application: People often feel the need to "add" to the work of Jesus as if they must do something to please God. But what can be added to what God has done? If His plan of salvation isn't capable of saving, then whatever we do is surely not going to take care of the problem. Rest in Jesus, trust in Jesus, and don't add to the gospel which says that you are saved by grace through faith. Anything else isn't the gospel.

Heavenly Father, after hearing what others say about salvation, I must ask, "What could I add to the work of Jesus?" It is beyond ridiculous to assume that You sent Him to save me but I need to do more in order to be saved. Rather, I accept that I am saved by grace through faith. In other words, I have believed and I am saved. Deal done! Thank You for this simplicity, because we sure need it. Amen.

For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.
2 Corinthians 3:11

Again, Paul shows the contrast between the Law of Moses and the New Covenant in Christ's blood. Here he uses the term "is passing away" which is a present participle. Why, if the New Covenant has replaced the Old, has he termed it this way? One could argue that it was because the temple was still standing in Jerusalem until it was destroyed in AD70. However, Paul is writing doctrine for the church age - all of it. What he wrote then still applies now. So what does this mean?

The answer is that Israel has not yet received Jesus Christ as a collective whole. Daniel 9 shows that they have seven more years in the prophetic timeline to do so. These years are yet future and a temple will be rebuilt, sacrifices will be made, and the Old Covenant will be employed during those seven years. This does not mean it is acceptable for a relationship with God, but that it is a time which is preparing them for an acceptable relationship with Him through Jesus, exactly as Daniel prophesied. This is the same type of terminology which is found in Hebrews –

"In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." Hebrews 8:13

Based on the structure of the Bible, the letters after Paul's epistles which begin with Hebrews are specifically directed to the Jews of the end times. This is why the terminology is used. God reaches out, one last time, to the Jews of the end times for reconciliation to Him. It is coming and may it be soon that they receive their Messiah!

Understanding this, Paul says that this which is "passing away" was glorious. It was received in glory and it bears the holy character of God. Jesus alone fulfilled it, demonstrating His glory. And He remains through it, having shed His blood in fulfillment of the passing glory and being resurrected to lead us to that which is "much more glorious." We have an eternal glory before us in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This glory is now bestowed upon all who receive Him.

Life application: Reinserting the law, which Christ has fulfilled, is to reject the work He accomplished for us. Let us stand firm on the truth that He is the fulfillment of the law and He is where our hope and trust must lie. Not in works, but in faith.

Heavenly Father, I will boast in Christ the Lord and in Him alone. No work on earth will get me one inch closer to You. Instead, He fulfilled the law which only brought condemnation, and He prevailed over that law. Now, through faith in His work, the law is nullified to me. I stand reconciled through the work of Another! Thank You God for Jesus Christ my Lord! Amen.

Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—
2 Corinthians 3:12

The word "therefore" is given as a general summary of what has been thus far stated. He has been speaking of the supremacy of the New Covenant which is written on our hearts and which exceeds even the glory of the Old which came at Sinai in such a wondrous display. It was written on tablets of stone by the very finger of God, and yet it cannot compare to what we now have in Christ. In verse 4, Paul spoke of "trust through Christ toward God." Now he builds on that by saying, "...since we have such hope."

It is the future of what the "trust" implies. We have trust now and that leads us to hope in what the future holds. And because of this hope he says "we use great boldness of speech." This again builds on a previous verse. Towards the end of the previous chapter, he said -

"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 Corinthians 2:17

His words are in sincerity "as from God." Therefore, because they are and because they carry a weight and a glory which even surpasses that of the Old Covenant, he is able to use this boldness, knowing that it has God's sure stamp of approval. Paul's confidence in the message he spoke was grounded in the very workings of God in redemptive history!

Today Christians have Paul's words, written and recorded in his epistles. They carry all of the same weight, glory, and power as what Paul spoke to the masses he met along his journeys. How can we not feel the same confidence as he? How can we not speak with the same boldness? If God be for us (and He is if we rightly proclaim His word), then who can be against us?

Life application: Who cares if your life is threatened for speaking out the truth of the gospel? If it be the gospel you speak, it is the very message that saved you and will continue to save you. Speak it!

Heavenly Father, the immense amount of moral perversion which is being exercised in the world today was anticipated by You. Your word told us this was coming. But Your gospel truth is more powerful to save us than the threats of those people are to harm us. In the end, the world can even take our lives, but our souls are safe with You. Come what may, I will proclaim Jesus Christ is Lord; His word is fixed, firm, and unchanging; and He is the only path to salvation for mankind. I stand on the truth of Jesus. Amen.

...unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. 2 Corinthians 3:13

When Moses came down from the mountain, his face shone. Because of this, he veiled his face other than when he spoke to the Israelites the words of the Lord. However, when he went before the Lord, he would again take it off. The reason for the veiling then was to hide the brightness of the reflected glory of God because it was so difficult to look upon him.

That reason seems to correspond with what Paul said earlier in verse 3:7, but in this verse, Paul seems to indicate another reason altogether. It was "so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away." In Romans 10, Paul shows that the law had an end which is found in the work of Christ. This is why the law "was passing away" -

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

-Romans 10:4

Therefore, Paul is using the account of the Israelites before Moses as a parable of the time in which we live. The law is ended in Christ, but the Israelites could not see the end of it. They looked at the law as permanent and as a means to an end. But the law was intended to lead us to Christ. Because they missed this, they "could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away." And this is exactly what has happened in the dispensational model of history.

However, Olshausen asks, "How could St Paul say that Moses covered his countenance in order that the Israelites should not behold Christ?" His question seems to imply that it would be wrong for Israel, who was looking for their Messiah, to be denied seeing Christ. However, this is an incorrect analysis. They were not denied this actively. Instead, they chose to deny Him. They were offered Christ in Acts 2. From there, and throughout Acts, it shows the truth that Jesus was rejected by them. Paul explains this in Romans 11-

"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Romans 11:25

God knew in advance that Israel would reject their Messiah, but it served a greater purpose in that the nations received Him and became the called-out Gentile church. Israel was set-aside during this dispensation "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." And yet, even during this dispensation, there has always been a remnant of Israel who is saved by grace (see Romans 11:5).

There is a time coming when the Gentiles will have reached their fullness and they will be raptured home to be with the Lord. At that time, the focus will be on the nation of Israel once again. On that day, the veil will be taken away and they will see that Christ is, in fact, the end of the law for all who believe.

Life application: Let us pray for Israel as a nation to have their collective eyes opened to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. God is working on them now and that wondrous day is coming. May it be soon!

Heavenly Father, Your word says that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. But many have had a veil over their eyes so that they could not see what was passing away in the Law of Moses. Lord, lift that veil and show them that there is an exceeding glory in the work of Jesus Christ that has brought the law to its end

and which has bestowed marvelous grace on all who will but believe. I pray that many eyes will be opened to what You have done through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:14

Referring to the Jews, and any others who would follow in the misguided notion about the purpose and continuance of the Old Testament, Paul states that "their minds were blinded." The word for "blinded" is *poroo*. It properly means, "made of *stone*; (figuratively) *insensible*; dull, *unperceptive* as a rock; calloused (hardened); i.e., unresponsive (dense), completely lacking sensitivity or spiritual perception." For this reason, many translations prefer the word "hardened" instead of "blinded."

The hardening of one's eyes indicates a spiritual blindness, so the same concept is understood. However, this action is often as much self-willed and purposeful in some, as it is lacking in others. In other words, there are those who have been told that Jesus permeates the Old Testament and is revealed in the New, but they willingly harden their minds to this fact.

The New Testament on numerous occasions shows that the law is fulfilled in Christ and thus it is nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14); annulled (Hebrews 7:18); obsolete (Hebrews 8:13); and taken away (Hebrews 10:9). These and multiple other references show that those who cling to the Old Testament for the application of their spiritual doctrine have "until this day the same veil" covering their spiritual senses that kept them from seeing Christ (or the fullness of His work) in the very law which is now abolished.

Paul couldn't be clearer on this, and yet it is not only the Jewish people, but countless heretical sects which reintroduce the law and thus bring condemnation on themselves. In Christ is found the embodiment of the law. Therefore, in Christ is where we are to place our hopes. This veil which remains in place is "unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament." Anytime the law is read to a person who is trying to be justified by the law, the veil remains. They have missed Christ and are attempting to seek a right-standing before God based on personal merit. It is a self-condemning act.

Finally, the NKJV ends this verse with, "because the *veil* is taken away in Christ." This is a possible translation, but it is not the intent of Paul's words. Notice that the word "veil" is inserted (italicized words are inserted); it is not in the Greek. In their translation they

have incorrectly assumed that it is the veil which is taken away in Christ. But this is properly explained in verse 16. Rather, Paul's words here are speaking of the law itself. In Christ, the law is taken away. Only when one realizes this is the veil then removed. Here is John Darby's translation of this verse, rightly showing Paul's intent -

"But their thoughts have been darkened, for unto this day the same veil remains in reading the old covenant, unremoved, which in Christ is annulled." Darby

Once it is understood that the old covenant is annulled and a turning to the Lord has taken place, then verse 16 can occur - "Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

Life application: If you are in a church which mandates precepts from the Old Testament - circumcision, Sabbath worship (meaning Saturday), tithing, etc. then get out of there. We do not reinsert into the New what has been annulled in the Old!

Lord God, would I sing songs about the work of Christ for me and then reinsert a law which is fulfilled in Him? Will I pick and choose certain precepts from the Old Covenant which is annulled in Him and decide that they need to be adhered to? Will I mandate Sabbath-day worship when He is my rest? Will I tell people that they need to tithe in order to be pleasing to You? No way! Jesus fulfilled the law and the law is obsolete. I stand on the work of Christ and my doctrine comes from the New Testament epistles. Thank You for Jesus who did the hard work for me so that I can rest in Him and follow in obedience to the New Covenant in His blood! Hooray for Jesus! Amen.

But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 2 Corinthians 3:15

In the previous verse, Paul notes this concerning the Jews - "But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ." As explained in that verse evaluation, the "veil" should be rendered "the old covenant." In support of that, Paul continues with, "But even to this day..."

It has to be remembered that Paul wrote this epistle about 30 years after the time of Christ. The temple was still standing, the Jews attended their synagogues and read weekly from the Torah, and the veil remained over their hearts concerning the work of the Lord. He was just as hidden to them then as He was before He came. Now, it is about 2000 years later and the same truth applies. When Jews meet to discuss the Torah, the details of Christ are hidden from them.

The time for this is ending though. Jews are converting to Christ at an ever-increasing rate. Israel has been returned to the land of Israel as prophesied. The nations of the world are coming against them just as the Bible showed would happen. All of this is preparing them for one final seven-year period where a temple will stand and they will finally understand what Daniel was talking about in verses 9:24-27 of his book.

In the end, the Jewish nation will finally call out to Jesus and He will return to rescue them. But until that happens, the veil lies on their heart. We are witnessing the coming end of the church age and the time of Daniel's 70th week which will end with the veil finally being removed.

Life application: It is a messy world and it is getting messier, but God has a plan which He is working on through it all. Stand back and watch the Lord work! Israel is being prepared for a meeting with their true Messiah.

Heavenly Father, Your word said that Israel would be returned again to occupy the land of Israel. It also says that this group of people is being prepared for a meeting with their Messiah. They will call and He will answer; the veil will be lifted and the glory of Jesus will finally be realized. Both testaments show this as clearly as could be... may it be soon. Even so - come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 2 Corinthians 3:16

Different translators look at what is being said here in a couple of ways. In the NKJV, it says "when one turns to the Lord." It implies that each time a Jew turns to Jesus, the veil is taken away. However, other translations say, "...when it shall turn to the Lord." This then would be speaking of the heart of Israel collectively. The Weymouth version says this more specifically with the words, "But whenever the heart of the nation shall have returned to the Lord, the veil will be withdrawn."

It is true that individually as Jews come to the Lord, the veil is taken away. However, the context of the passage is implying the nation as a whole. This was actually pictured in Exodus 34. In verse 31 it says -

"Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them." Exodus 34:31

The prophetic picture of that passage is that the rulers (who represent the nation) "returned" to Moses. The word drives the analogy which Paul clearly saw and is using

for us to see. This is also pictured in the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 and of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers in Genesis 41. Further, it is explicitly stated by Jesus in Matthew 23 -

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! ³⁸ See! Your house is left to you desolate; ³⁹ for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” Matthew 23:37-39

Jesus, speaking to Jerusalem which is the seat of power in Israel, said that when they call on Him, He will come to them. This implies that the veil has been taken away. Zechariah speaks of the effect of this moment on the people -

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only *son*, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." Zechariah 12:10

Life application: It should be as apparent as the nose on one's face that Jesus is not through with the nation of Israel. If you are a "replacement theologian" you may be missing your nose.

Heavenly Father, I thank You that I have been granted the blessing of living at a time when Israel has been restored to her homeland. Your word promises that she will never be uprooted again. It also promises that they will realize the truth of who their Messiah is in due time. I pray for that wonderful day when the veil is lifted and they see Him in all His splendor! Amen.

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.

2 Corinthians 3:17

This phrase seems perplexing, but it is only perplexing if we fail to look for the context of Paul's thoughts. In verse 3:6, he said, "...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." He is now returning to that thought, as if the intervening verses were parenthetical.

He has been contrasting the supremacy of the new covenant over the old. In doing so, he gave the example of Moses' veil as a picture of how the truth of Christ is veiled to those who read the law without the connection of who Jesus is in relation to the words it contains. Once a person (specifically a Jew, and more specifically the nation of Israel collectively) turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

In this is found the answer to what Paul is saying. The Lord is the Spirit of biblical interpretation. This is not speaking then of the Holy Spirit but the knowledgeable relationship between what is written in the law and what it is pointing out, which is Christ Jesus. As He said Himself in John 5 -

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." John 5:39

The sentiment that Paul is giving here is very similar to the words of the angel who spoke to John in Revelation 19 -

"Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."
-Revelation 19:10

Albert Barnes explains the intent of this verse quite well -

"The sense is, that Christ was the Spirit; that is, the sum, the substance of the Old Testament. The figures, types, prophecies, etc. all centered in him, and he was the end of all those institutions. If contemplated as having reference to him, it was easy to understand them."

Understanding who Jesus is, and understanding what Scripture is saying about Him, leads to the liberty that Paul addresses. The Jews only find true liberty from the veil which covers their eyes when they turn to the Lord.

Life application: One can read Scripture all day long and not properly understand it unless they recognize that it is revealing Jesus. Therefore, arguing Scripture with those who do not accept who He is makes no sense. They must first be correctly trained in the Subject of Scripture before they can understand the meaning behind the words.

Heavenly Father, You have given us Scripture to reveal Jesus to us. And so, it is obvious why so many people misuse Your word. They create a Jesus in their own image rather than receiving Him as He is portrayed. This leads to a false gospel and a sad future which

lies ahead for them. I pray that people will determine to look for the truth in Your word and stop believing the false presentations of Jesus which have become so commonplace in the modern church. Open eyes Lord! Amen.

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.

2 Corinthians 3:18

In verse 16, Paul said that "...when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." As a word to those who are in Christ, he shows that this is already true. For us there is no veil - "But we all, with unveiled face..." Instead of a veil, we are "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." It seems rather difficult to scholars exactly how to translate this. Some say "contemplate the Lord's glory," "can see and reflect the glory," "beholding as in a glass the glory," "reflecting like bright mirrors the glory," and so on.

However, the Bible should always be interpreted with the Bible. In doing so, the difficulty will clear up. The word for "beholding" here is *katoptrizó*. It means "beholding as in a mirror." It is used only this once in the New Testament and therefore Paul has specific intent on choosing this word instead of a word comparable to, say, 1 Corinthians 13:12. By going back to the account of Moses, we can determine what the intent is. In Exodus 33, we read this exchange between Moses and the Lord -

"And he said, 'Please, show me Your glory.'

¹⁹ Then He said, 'I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.'²⁰ But He said, 'You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.'" Exodus 33:18-20

In this, we are told that man "cannot see" the face of the Lord and live. However, in Jesus we are told that He is "the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person" (Hebrews 1:3). Putting the thoughts together then, Paul has been contrasting the Law of Moses with the new covenant. Therefore, he is saying that when we see the gospel message, we are as if "looking into a mirror" which reflects the glory of God. In Christ we behold His glory. We cannot say we are looking directly at the Lord because He is not present with us at this time. Therefore, it is the truth of Christ that we are beholding in the message of Christ.

Therefore, the translation of the NKJV is correct. At this time, we are "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord" each time we contemplate the gospel or (now because it is

written) search out the New Testament Scriptures. And, in the searching out of Christ in this way, Paul says that we "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory."

Just as Moses' face reflected the glory of God when he came before the Israelites, so we are being transformed. It is not a physical transformation, but a spiritual one. As we conform to the prescriptions of the New Testament, and as we follow as disciples of Christ, we are being spiritually transformed into that same image; the image of Christ, thus, "from glory to glory." We behold the glory and it transforms us to that glory.

Paul finishes this thought and the chapter with the words, "just as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is the Spirit who calls, it is the Spirit who seals, and it is the Spirit who sanctifies. As we pursue Christ from glory to glory, the Spirit is accomplishing His role in the process to conform us to the image of God in Christ.

Life application: To know God, you must know Jesus Christ. To know Jesus Christ, you must know your Bible. If you claim Jesus while circumventing the Bible, then how do you know you're not following a false Christ? Read your Bible.

Heavenly Father, how often I see people claim Jesus as "Savior" and yet they don't acknowledge what they are being "saved" from. Being saved implies having been in peril. Your wrath is as evident in the pages of the Bible as is Your love. But the world wants to circumvent the wrath and focus only on the love. They have made a god in the image they want and have not called out to You in true hope of being saved from the wrath You feel at our sin. Help eyes to be opened to the truth of who You are. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. 2 Corinthians 4:1

In the previous chapter, Paul noted that he and the apostles were ministers of the new covenant (3:6); that it was a ministry of the Spirit (3:8); and that it was a ministry of righteousness (3:9). This is the ministry that he is speaking of. Everything about it is superior to the old covenant which was received by Moses. This ministry, as he explained, is one of revealing the surpassing glory of God that will not fade away.

However, his next words show that he is not bragging about the marvelous honor that has been bestowed upon them. Rather, in the reception of the ministry, mercy had been bestowed. As fallen men, they were inherently unworthy of the position and status that they now bore. Paul alludes to this in 1 Timothy 1-

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, ¹³ although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief." 1 Timothy 1:12, 13

In the mercy poured out on him and the others, they were enabled to "not lose heart." On several occasions, Paul speaks of standing strong in the faith and he encourages others to act likewise. One example of this is found in Galatians 6 -

"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." Galatians 6:9

The term to "lose heart" implies being worn out or wearied to the point that one is no longer effective. But Paul knew that with the reception of God's mercy came the inner strength to endure the challenges that came with the ministry. Two other instances of the use of this word by Paul are found in Ephesians 3:13 and 2 Thessalonians 3:13.

Paul was constantly encouraging those who had been saved, knowing that like him, they had been given everything necessary to continue their walk of faith to the end.

Life application: If God has saved you, then He has a purpose for you in His church. If He has a purpose for you in His church, then He has also enabled you to meet that purpose.

Don't shrink back from the honor bestowed upon you, but use it to its fullest to His glory.

Lord God, I know for sure that You have had mercy on me in this life. And I know that along with that mercy comes the responsibility to share this knowledge with others. As this is true, then You have certainly endowed me with the ability to fulfill that responsibility. And so, help me to use my time wisely in the ministry to which You have called me. I know You are here with me in it and so I know that I can fulfill it! Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 4:2

Building upon the thought of "this ministry" which he mentioned in verse 1, Paul acknowledges the purity of it. The word "but" is given as a contrast to "having received mercy." They had once needed mercy and based on the granting of that, they (meaning him and the apostles) "have renounced the hidden things of shame." Charges had been leveled against him for various reasons and certainly the others had been slandered in one way or another as well. But those were mere words without truth.

Rather than speaking of things which are inappropriate, the speech of the apostles was pure and pointed to holiness, not illicit behavior. And not only did he conduct his speech in this manner, but he encouraged others to as well. In his letter to the Ephesians, he said -

"For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret." Ephesians 5:12

Further, their conduct was "not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully." The word Paul uses for "craftiness" indicates "crafty behavior; unscrupulous cunning that stops at nothing to achieve a selfish goal." In contrast to such an attitude his life, doctrine, and intent for sharing the gospel was open and only had the best of others in mind.

There was nothing but good intent and honesty in his conduct. He proved this by working with his own hands to sustain himself rather than peddling the word of God for profit. And this is exactly what he means by the use of the word translated as "deceitfully."

It is a word used only here in the New Testament and it gives the idea of "to ensnare; then to corrupt. Used of adulterating gold, wine, etc" (Vincent's Word Studies). If someone were to take something of value and water it down by mixing in something of lesser value, they would be acting in this manner. But Paul held the word of God in the highest reverence and refused to budge an inch on its proper presentation.

Instead of acting in such a disgraceful way, he says they had conducted themselves "by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." In other words, they understood that what they did was in the sight of God and therefore they purposed to always act with this in mind. At the end of the day, their conscience was clean from anything that would be considered dishonest or disreputable. If only all of God's ministers would act in such a forthright manner today!

Life application: The Bible is God's word, not ours. When we share it, we are to hold it in the high reverence that it deserves, knowing that the Source holds it as His chosen means of relaying the truth about Himself to us. Further, when we share it, it is in His presence. Therefore, we must remember that He knows our treatment of it and will hold us accountable for how we present it.

Lord God Almighty, You have chosen the Bible as the means of specifically revealing Yourself to us. Therefore, how we treat it is a reflection on our heart's attitude toward You. You entered the stream of humanity in the Person of Jesus and this great book reveals Him to us. Therefore, when we diminish Your word, we show contempt for Him and thus for You. Help each of us to soberly consider how we treat Your superior word, knowing that an offense against it is an offense against You personally. Amen.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,
2 Corinthians 4:3

The previous verse spoke of the "hidden things of shame" which Paul and the apostles had renounced. Instead, he spoke of the "manifestation of the truth" which is found in the gospel message. He now writes words which are intended to correct any perceived contradiction. In saying that it is the manifestation of the truth, then how can it be veiled to some? A manifestation implies something that is open and available to all. But there are some who haven't received it because they are "perishing."

As he notes, "if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing." Therefore, there is no contradiction in his words. People must be willing to accept that Jesus is the explanation for, and fulfillment of, all Scripture. If they fail to accept this, then the veil

remains (as he noted in the previous chapter). The result for such people is that they "are perishing." But there is a note of hope even in his words. He uses a present participle for the word "perishing" rather than a past participle. In other words, he doesn't say, "to those who have perished." Because of this, it does not exclude hope of the person turning to the Lord and having the veil lifted (Keep praying for your Jewish friends!).

The gospel is the manifestation of the truth and it is available to any who will but receive it - even until their dying breath. Albert Barnes gives a lovely set of examples of comparison for us to consider -

"It is not the fault of the sun when people shut their eyes and will not see it. It is not the fault of a running stream, or a bubbling fountain, if people will not drink of it, but rather choose to die of thirst. The gospel does not obscure and conceal its own glory any more than the sun does. It is in itself a clear and full revelation of God and his grace; and that glory is adapted to shed light upon the benighted minds of people."

Life application: Minds are easily dulled and we tend to gravitate towards those things which we prefer, regardless if they are right or wrong. The gospel sets us free from this, and yet until we come to it, the perception is that we will lose all of the things we like in the process. Instead, when we come to Christ, we are enabled to appreciate things in their proper perspective. As we grow closer to Him through His word, what is right becomes increasingly desirable and that which is wrong becomes increasingly undesirable. Truly a veil is lifted in Christ.

Heavenly Father, in turning to Jesus, there is a new love of that which is right and proper. However, unless we continue to study Your word and pursue righteousness, it is so easy to get bogged down in a morally confused state where tolerance rather than obedience is the norm. From there, our religion devolves into acceptance of that which is morally improper once again. I pray that hearts will turn towards You with a desire to seek Your whole counsel as recorded in Scripture. Anything less will certainly result in sadness when we stand before You. Amen.

...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.

2 Corinthians 4:4

The "whose" of this verse are "those who are perishing" of the previous verse. Those who have not received the gospel of Christ are perishing. And the reason for this is that

their "minds the god of this age has blinded." Spiritual darkness is a pall which is found in all people born of man. Sin is an inherited trait and those who have sinned (all of them) are under the power of the devil. Here he is termed "the god of this age." This is the only time this phrase is used of him, but it corresponds with other such names for him in the Bible, such as -

"The ruler of this world" (John 14:30).

"The prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2).

"The wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

These terms, among others, give us varied descriptions of the devil so that we can see his sphere of influence and the characteristics which define him. In this verse, Paul shows that he is in control of the lost during this age until Christ is finished with His complete plan of redemption found in the dispensational model. Eventually he will be cast into the Lake of Fire and a new age will come to pass (Revelation 20:10).

However, during this age he has blinded the eyes of those "who do not believe." The tense of the Greek for "has blinded" is aorist-indicative-active. This means that he has blinded man in the past (which occurred at the fall of man), but it doesn't necessarily mean that the blindness continues in the present. In other words, he has blinded the world, but the world can come to see the light through Jesus Christ. Until they do, they remain blind. Jesus alludes to this type of thing in John 9 -

"And Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.'

⁴⁰ Then *some* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?'

⁴¹ Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains.'" John 9:39-41

The devil has done this, as Paul explains, "lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." Though this is speaking of all who are in Adam, Paul has specifically been speaking of the veil which is over the eyes of the Jews who have failed to see Christ revealed in Scripture. He is giving an explanation of why this is so.

The word he uses for "light" is *photismos*. It is a special word which is used only here and then again in verse 6. Ellicott notes that the word signifies not merely a purpose, but a result. To understand this, we can think of a person with blinded eyes. When he

turns his face to the sun, there is no perception of the sun at all. Not only does he not see the light, but he cannot see the light.

The intent of the Scriptures is to illumine the "glory of Christ." However, the Jews cannot see this because they have been blinded. God knew that this would occur and thus the dispensation of grace, which is the Church Age, was introduced. During Israel's time of blindness (Romans 9-11), salvation has come to the Gentiles. Instead of seeing Christ, who is the image of God, they see only darkness.

Finally, the word for "shine" here is *augazo*. It is only used here in the New Testament and it indicates "to shine forth." Christ radiates from the Bible just as the sun shines forth at dawn (which is where the root of the word *augazo* comes from). Paul's use of this word is described by the Bible scholar Charles Ellicott -

It "...stands as intermediate between the object and the shadow, far plainer than the latter, yet not identical with the former, however adequately representing it."

In other words, Scripture is not the Lord, but it accurately represents Him. Thus, His radiance shines forth from it. However, in eyes which are blinded, there can be no shining forth of this beautiful radiance.

Life application: If you wonder why someone hasn't come to Christ, this verse may adequately describe their situation. They have been blinded by the devil and they cannot see Him in Scripture. However, through prayer we have a weapon to overcome this blindness. Never stop praying for the lost!

Heavenly Father, I know that the god of this world, the devil, is the one who blinds people to the truth of Scripture. The life of Christ radiates from it, but when eyes are blind, they cannot perceive His glory. I pray for the lost that I know, desiring that You open the eyes which are blinded so that they can see. I know that through You all things are possible. Open the eyes! Change the hearts! This I pray, O God. Amen.

For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Corinthians 4:5

Paul is continually directing or redirecting his readers to Jesus and away from himself. However, he often uses himself and/or those with him in his conversation. It is a natural thing to do, but charges of either egotism or personal gain could arise if his words were

misapplied or misinterpreted. Because of this, he occasionally reminds those to whom he is writing that Jesus, not he, is the center of his theology.

He has been discussing the veil which covered the eyes of those who had rejected Jesus as the focus of Scripture. Then he noted in the previous verse that "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Now his words show that the "light of the gospel" is "not ourselves." There is no personal boasting. Instead, the light of which he writes is "Jesus Christ as Lord."

Early in his first letter to the Corinthians, he wrote -

"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." 1 Corinthians 2:2

And then earlier in the letter he is now writing he said -

"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 Corinthians 2:17

These and other reminders are brought into his letters to demonstrate clearly that it is all about Jesus. Personal references are simply life experiences that help make the message of Jesus more understandable, more personal, etc. They are not intended to draw the masses to himself, but to Jesus Christ. To further confirm this, he says that not only do they proclaim Jesus, but "ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."

Paul always attempted to exalt Jesus at every chance, and he diminished himself and the other apostles to their rightful position of being *doulos* (literally slaves) to those they ministered to. If they were slaves to the Corinthians, then how could they be egoists or braggarts? Rather, they had only the exaltation of Christ as their main goal and intent.

Life application: When in church, what is the preacher focusing on most? Pay attention to his words, particularly those in the sermon. Are they centered on you? If so, he may be using platitudes to schmooze you.

Are they centered on him? If so, then he probably has an ego problem that he wants filled with your adoration. Are they centered on a general "God" without specificity on Christ? Then his theology is probably severely lacking. Are they centered on the Holy Spirit? Then not only is his theology severely lacking, he has probably purposely directed

your attention away from what is proper and onto himself. This is because he is most likely claiming to be a vehicle (rather than the Bible) by which the Holy Spirit reveals truth - bad juju there. Or are they centered on Christ? If they are, then they are properly directed words, proclaiming what the intent of Scripture truly is.

Heavenly Father, Your word is given to show us Jesus. If a preacher or a teacher focuses on the congregation, himself, a general or ambiguous "God," or even on the Holy Spirit, then he has missed the intent of Scripture and he has wasted his words. Scripture is centered on and reveals Jesus. Without that, the focus of Scripture - Jesus - is lost. Help pastors to properly preach and teach Your word; revealing to us the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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.
2 Corinthians 4:6

Following Paul's order of thought, we can see how he is weaving together his words in order to best reveal what God has done in the giving of the gospel. In the previous verse, he seemed to stop his train of thought and redirect his readers to the understanding that everything he is conveying is not about himself, but about Jesus Christ.

And the verse just before that, he wrote -

"...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." (verse 4)

He now pens verse 6 which is given to contrast what was seen in verse 4. The "god of this age" is now contrasted with "the God" (meaning the true God). Those who have rejected Christ have their minds blinded. However, the true God who "commanded light to shine out of darkness" has once again revealed light. The creation account in Genesis 1 is being equated with the "new creation" in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). What occurs when the veil is lifted is as marvelous as the original light shining out of darkness!

And the intent for this is that God "has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." There is a definite point in time - in the life of Paul, in the life of each of the apostles, and in the life of every person

who comes to Christ at the time of their conversion, when the light of what God has done through the work of Jesus shines upon our hearts.

At that wondrous moment, the veil is lifted and Christ is revealed. However, there is another contrast in these words. The glory of the law was a reflection from Moses' face to the people of Israel. However, the glory of Jesus is not a reflection, but the transmission of God's glory. This is seen, for example, in Hebrews 1 -

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³ who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power..." Hebrews 1:1-3

In Paul's words here, we find the second and final use of the word *phótismos*, or light, in Scripture. He used it in verse 4 (cited above) and now he uses it again to show that in seeing Christ, we are seeing the full illumination and splendor of God who is the Source of all light. In other words, Jesus is the one who reveals our heavenly Father. As he said in John 14 -

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father." John 14:9

The light came into the world at the spoken word of God and Jesus is that spoken Word. In Him the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily and in Him we have our eternal light and life.

Life application: If you feel beaten up by the world, refresh yourself in the word. Pick up your Bible and remind yourself that God has it all under control. He has given us Jesus and Jesus is fully sufficient to carry you through this world of darkness and into God's marvelous light.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the light of Christ in my life! I have every assurance that no matter how bad things get, I have an eternal hope because of what You have done through Your Son. There is light, there is joy, and there is peace in opening Your word and finding there wonderful passages which show me Your love for us in the giving of Christ to bring us back to You. I love You and will stand content in You until the day You come for me! Amen.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 2 Corinthians 4:7

Paul has been speaking of his ministry which is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (verse 6). It is a ministry which surpasses the reflected glory of the Old Covenant which was written on stone. This light is written on the hearts of the believers. Paul, using this symbolism says that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." There is a dual significance to those words.

First, man was taken from the dust and formed into a living being. Therefore, by mixing in the right amount of water, and then adding in God's animating breath, we have been formed into "earthen vessels." We are fragile and yet we are suited for various purposes; some noble and some ignoble. But we have all been fashioned by the Creator. This symbolism is found in the Old Testament, but a very good rendering is in Jeremiah 18:1-11.

The second significance is that of the habit of people to use earthen vessels (jars of clay) for storing valuables. This is seen throughout the Bible as well. A good example of this is the story of Elijah and the widow in 1 Kings 17:8-15. It was also known that kings, returning conquerors, and wealthy people would store gold, silver, and other valuables in such jars as well. Even the precious wine created by the Lord in John 2:1-12 was kept in such clay jars.

Paul ties the two concepts together - humans being made of clay and being "jars" suitable for containing things, and real clay jars that are used for storing all sorts of things, valuable or of little value. To him the "treasure" that he bore, which is the ministry of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, is the most valuable treasure of all. And yet, it is contained in a weak clay jar which has no value at all in comparison to what it contains.

The reason for this is "that excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." The word translated as "excellence" is *hyperbolé*. It literally means "a throwing beyond. Hence preeminence, excellence" (Vincent's Word Studies). Within the saved believer is something of exceeding value - far, far beyond the value of the container which holds it. Such is the nature of the grace of God. He has condescended to allow His weak, fragile creatures to share in His exceeding glory, and He has allowed us to speak of it to others. It radiates forth from the darkened vessel with a magnificence which completely overshadows its faults. Thus, it is obvious that the glory is "of God and not of us."

Life application: The most marvelous and glorious thing that we possess is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is a possession that is not intended to be kept hidden away, but shared with all. As we open our jar of clay and allow it to come forth, the contents are never diminished. Instead, they continue to overflow. Therefore, there is no loss to us when we share it, but there is great gain for all who receive it. Speak the word!

Heavenly Father, You have granted that I, a lowly and fragile jar of clay, may possess the greatest contents of all - the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Is it right that I keep this knowledge hidden inside me? That was never Your intent! When I share this wondrous treasure, what I possess never lessens. Instead, it continues to flow no matter how much I share. Therefore, I retain the wealth and others are enriched by it as well. Help me to remember this Lord and to share this marvelous fortune with every person I encounter. To Your glory! Amen.

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 2 Corinthians 4:8

There is a lot going on in these few words as Paul's ideas were printed onto the parchment. The previous verse began with "But we have..." The verb was present-indicative. Now this verse has all of the clauses in a present-participle form. Thus, they are in apposition - "we have/we are." Each of the articles in this verse respects inward conflicts, whereas each in the next verse will deal with external conflicts.

Also, in each of these clauses the idea is building upon the previous verse which noted first the "treasure in earthen vessels" and then "the excellence of the power...of God." The first deals with the fragility of the created, the second with the power of the Creator. He is showing the superiority of the contents in the vessel despite the weakness of the vessel itself.

His first words "hard-pressed on every side" show their seeming inability to break away from that which is troubling them. And yet because of God's power, they were "not crushed." Despite the pressures, they were able to bear up.

Further, he says they were "perplexed." The word indicates an inability to find a way out of something. And yet, at the same time, they were "not in despair." In these last two words a paronomasia results. They are *aporoumenoi* and *exaporoumenoi*. It is as if Paul was temporarily tempted by a tasty treat of targeted tones in order to tantalize the ears of his readers. In an attempt to reproduce the original, one translator says "pressed, but not oppressed."

Paul is showing that by living through the power of God, they were (and thus we are) able to bear up under the turmoil and trouble that constantly came their way. If we rely on our own physical make-up, we will surely see only defeat. But when we rely on the strength that is given by God, we will be able to bear up as the attacks come our way. As Paul says it elsewhere, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Life application: It is easy to read words such as Philippians 4:13 and say, "I will hold to this and trust in it." However, it is much harder to continue to trust those words when the difficulties come. This is why we must memorize them and repeat them to ourselves again and again. We do this so that when the difficulties arrive, we will be prepared mentally to allow the strength of the Lord to take the lead.

Heavenly Father, help me to not just memorize catchy verses from the Bible, but to sincerely take them to heart in order to prepare me for the day of battle. When the trials arrive, grant me that sure confidence that what Your word says really does apply, even in the most difficult or darkest moments. Help me in this Lord. Grant me the surest confidence in Your wonderful word at all times. Amen.

...persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 2 Corinthians 4:9

Paul continues with his contrasts which began in the previous verse. Those previous contrasts were from internal struggles; these are from external ones. His imagery is as if a soldier in combat who is first "persecuted, but not forsaken." The words have the intent of "pursued, but not abandoned" (Ellicott). As if they were soldiers being pursued by an enemy, Paul says that even in such a state the Lord is with them. This follows along with the wording of Hebrews -

"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'⁶ So we may boldly say:

'The LORD is my helper;

I will not fear.

What can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:5, 6

And surely this imagery is appropriate because the state which Christians find themselves in is a true battle. Paul discusses this in detail in Ephesians 6. His description includes this thought -

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*." Ephesians 6:12

The second contrast is that they are "struck down, but not destroyed." This again is the imagery of a soldier whose life is spared despite being wounded. It could even be of wrestlers in a bout of mortal combat. When Jacob wrestled with the Lord in Genesis 32, the match continued without either letting up, and so in order to end the match, we read these words -

"Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him."

-Genesis 32:25

Jacob was struck down, but he was not destroyed in the process. The Lord could have done so, but instead He humbled him and yet spared him. Paul shows that this is the state of the apostles as they strived to share the message of Christ. With their many struggles, both internal and external, they were able to press on because the Lord was there with them to ensure they would never falter or fail.

Life application: The Bible says that the Lord will never leave His people and He will never forsake them. Paul was eventually martyred for his faith, as were almost every one of the apostles. Did the Lord break His promise? No! They have something that those who persecuted and killed them don't have. They have the assurance of eternal life because of their trust in Christ. Truly, what can man do to one who is saved by the blood of Christ!

Heavenly Father, You have promised to never leave nor forsake Your people, and yet millions of faithful Christians have been martyred over the ages. Should we lose hope? Should we despair? No! We should rejoice that they were saved by You and they are saved by You. As followers of Christ, we have the absolute assurance that the blood has saved us. No fear here! Whatever happens to this earthly body is temporary, but an eternal glory awaits. Hallelujah and Amen!

...always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 2 Corinthians 4:10

In the previous two verses, Paul made 4 contrasting thoughts concerning difficulties faced by the apostles and yet overcome by the power of God in them. Continuing on in

a similar vein, he says that they are "always carrying about in the body, the dying of the Lord Jesus." This is a reference to the sufferings and death of the Lord. The word "dying" is *nekrósis*. It means both the process of dying and the deadness of something which lacks any life at all. The only other use of it is in Romans 4:19 when speaking of the deadness of Sarah's womb.

In their bodies, the apostles were always carrying about this state. They were exposed to the constant threat of death and even experienced acts which could easily lead to death. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says -

"And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? ³¹ I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." 1 Corinthians 15:30, 31

And in a great summary of his sufferings which he endured, and the reason for them, he says to the Philippians -

"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

-Philippians 3:8-11

These references, and numerous others, show the constant threat of death which surrounded Paul and the other apostles. And yet they were willing to endure this, carrying the dying of the Lord with them, so "that the life of Jesus also may be manifest in our body." There are different opinions on what Paul is referring to here.

It could be that he was showing through his life of "dying" that he lives through the power of Christ, and thus he is an object lesson concerning death and resurrection. It could be that the power of Christ (because He is resurrected) is seen in the apostles; they are a witness to the life of Jesus. Or it could be that Paul is simply speaking as being one who emulates Christ. As he is dying and will die just as Christ died, so he will live again as Christ lived again; thus his life is patterned after the Lord - having died in a weak physical frame, and yet to be raised to an immortal new frame.

Whatever the intent of Paul's words truly is, he and the other apostles suffered for the name of Christ, both in death and in life. But to them (and therefore it should be to us) there was no loss, but only gain. As he said to those in Rome -

"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

-Romans 5:10

Life application: Christ died so that we could live. In proof that this is true, He now lives so that we are to have no fear in death. If we are in Christ, we have moved from death to life. The body may perish, but the hope of everlasting life is assured.

Heavenly Father, we have always lived in fear of death, but Christ came to die so that we could live. For those who accept His work by faith, we share in His victory over death and we have the assurance of eternal life. Thank You for the absolute guarantee we have because of the resurrection. Sin is nailed to the cross and therefore we can never be separated from You again. What a glorious promise! No fear here... Jesus has paved the way to eternal life! Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 4:11

This is a restatement and expansion upon the previous verse. Taken together, they read-

"...always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ 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."

Paul has, in these two verses, mentioned Jesus four times by name. The repetition of the name, instead of using a pronoun, highlights the honor he feels towards the Lord. In this verse he says, "For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake." The contrast between "life" and "death" is highlighted.

The apostles lived for Christ, telling others of Him and sharing the good news everywhere. But during this, they were constantly subjected to the possibility of death. And eventually, a death for the sake of His name became a reality for most of them. In this life in the face of death, the result was "that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

Here Paul substitutes "body" of the previous verse for "mortal flesh." This was done to highlight the corrupt nature of the body. Not yet being glorified, we are subject to pains, decay, and death. And yet, it highlights the life of Jesus all the more poignantly. His divine nature is seen through our corruptible bodies, and the hope of the resurrection is seen in the fact that we are dying. As the Bible scholar Alford says -

“God exhibits DEATH in the living that He may also exhibit LIFE in the dying.”

Life application: If you know someone with a terminal disease who exalts Christ Jesus through their affliction, then this verse may be more understandable. Jesus is manifest through the ending of their life; in their death is the assurance of fellowship with God through it all, including the coming resurrection unto eternal life.

Glorious God! I don't look forward to aging, falling apart, and having pains and difficulties in this mortal body. However, if I can be a testimony to the life of Jesus through my dying, and if I can give the devil a black eye in the process, then I will count whatever comes my way as an honor. Let my life, even in its corrupt state, be a witness to the glory of my Lord! Amen.

So then death is working in us, but life in you. 2 Corinthians 4:12

Paul has been speaking of the sufferings that he and the other apostles endured for the sake of the gospel. He went so far as to show the contrast between their lives, which were fraught with death, and that of the life of Christ working through them. As they were "delivered to death for Jesus' sake" the result was "that the life of Jesus" therefore would be manifested in them.

This then explains his words to the Corinthians to us now. He says, "So death is working in us" which refers to their state as apostles. But for the Corinthians it meant. "...life in you." In other words, "You reap the spiritual benefits (spiritual life through the gospel) of our physical struggles (physical death because of the gospel)."

If still not understood, we could give a purely physical example from everyday life. Firemen are constantly exposed to "death" as they enter buildings which have become a blazing torrent of fire, and yet those inside reap the chance of continued life because of their exposure to death. Such was the life of the apostle. They constantly faced death in order to carry the message of life.

Life application: The word of God has come to us at a very high cost. Not only the apostles, but a string of other faithful people have been willing to put themselves at great risk, even death sentences, to ensure that the precious word continues to go forth. Today, people still risk death by taking the Bible to others in places where it is banned. Let us never fail to appreciate the high cost which has brought this precious word to the people of the world.

Heavenly Father, throughout history many people have suffered for the sake of Your word. Prophets of old, apostles and their disciples, translators, printers, and even preachers and teachers have put the truth of Your word above their own safety, even risking their very lives so that this word will continue to be made known to others. And above all, Jesus my Lord gave His life so that the word would continue as planned. Grant me a heart to cherish this precious gift which has come to me at such a high cost. Help me to never give an inch on the truths it contains, but to speak boldly the whole counsel of Your word. Amen.

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, 2 Corinthians 4:13

Paul's words here, "And since we have the same spirit of faith" are speaking of the same type of faith as his readers. He has been showing that the position the apostles face because of their faith - such as being hard-pressed, yet not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; etc. is one based on faith. Further, the purpose of such desperate straits was for the sake of instilling faith in their Christian converts.

It is this "same spirit of faith" that Paul is referring to. Whether it is faith in distress or faith resulting from that distress, they shared in a unity of faith in the same message. Therefore, because the faith of the apostles was for the same end-goal as for that of those they shared it with, Paul cites the reason (remembering that the reason is what resulted in their many distresses). That reason is found in the Old Testament psalms. Paul says, "...according to what is written, 'I believed and therefore I spoke.'"

This is a line from the 116th Psalm. It speaks of a person who was in great trials and afflictions, just as the apostles were. And yet, he knew that God would hear his supplications despite those afflictions; he had not been abandoned by the Lord, but rather the trials were simply allowed by the Lord for His purposes. Likewise, the trials and afflictions of the apostles were not something which demonstrated that the Lord didn't care about them or their message. Rather, it demonstrated exactly the opposite.

These hardships were ordained by the Lord. And because of this he says, "...we also believe and therefore speak."

Knowing that these difficulties were a part of the Lord's purposes for them, they were all the more emboldened to speak. Their faith in Christ was unshaken by them. Read these first ten verses of the 116th Psalm and mentally put the apostles in place of the author and you will see what Paul is proclaiming -

I love the LORD, because He has heard
My voice *and* my supplications.
² Because He has inclined His ear to me,
Therefore I will call *upon Him* as long as I live.
³ The pains of death surrounded me,
And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me;
I found trouble and sorrow.
⁴ Then I called upon the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!"
⁵ Gracious *is* the LORD, and righteous;
Yes, our God *is* merciful.
⁶ The LORD preserves the simple;
I was brought low, and He saved me.
⁷ Return to your rest, O my soul,
For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
⁸ For You have delivered my soul from death,
My eyes from tears,
And my feet from falling.
⁹ I will walk before the LORD
In the land of the living.
¹⁰ I believed, therefore I spoke,
"I am greatly afflicted." Psalm 116:1-10

Life application: Like Job's friends, people in the world tend to look at hardships, difficulties, trials, and losses as meaning a person is not in God's favor. The reciprocal is then believed to be true. When things are going well and all is peachy, it is perceived that God must really favor that person. This is shallow at best and hardly conveys the message of the Bible. Often, hardships are used by the Lord for His purposes and they have nothing to do with His disfavor. Through good times and bad, be sure to praise the Lord and look for His hand in what is resulting from the situation as it unfolds.

Heavenly Father, we tend to look at hardships, difficulties, trials, and losses as a demonstration of Your disfavor. And we also look at good times and prosperity as a sign of Your favor. But Your word often shows that it is otherwise. Help us to not become dispirited in times of trial, nor boastful in times of ease. Rather, help us to accept our lot based on our faith in Jesus Christ, knowing that if we have received Him, then whatever our situation is - good or bad - it has come about because You love us. Give us such wisdom O God. Amen.

...knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 2 Corinthians 4:14

Paul has been speaking of the death which is manifested in him and the apostles. They died in their lives for the sake of those they minister to. Eventually, actual death would overtake them, but even in this there is a sure and firm hope. Death is of no true consequence to a believer and the apostles were completely certain of this, "...knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus."

As apostles, they had seen the risen Lord, they had seen His victory over death, and they knew that this too was promised to them. This is why they were so willing to die for Christ. Nothing could stop the inevitability of their resurrection, just as He was resurrected. The power of God raised Him up and that same power would also raise them up. This same sentiment is found in 1 Corinthians 6:14 -

"And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power."

But this promise was not just to those apostles who had first-hand knowledge of the Lord's work. It is true with all who believe. Together with the apostles, all who believe will be presented alive for all eternity by the power of God. Again, Paul writes of this in Romans 8:11 -

"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

This wondrous moment is described in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. Take time today to read those passages and have confidence that they will be fulfilled exactly as written. Eternal life is guaranteed to all who have placed their trust in Christ Jesus!

Life application: What fear should you have about death? If you have called on Christ, then show that your faith is more than just a superficial proclamation. Instead, if you face even the prospect of death, let the world know that death has no permanent authority over you. Christ is risen; you are in Christ; you too shall rise to eternal life.

Glorious God of all hope - You have spoken and Your word is true. Christ is risen from the dead and I am in Christ due to faith in His work. In this, I have the absolute assurance that I too will be raised to new and eternal life by You. There is no fear here. Rather, there is the eager anticipation of putting off this old tired tent and the excitement of a new, incorruptible, and eternal one. Christ is risen! Hallelujah and Amen!

For all things *are* for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 4:15

Paul's words here reflect the many trials that the apostles had faced and which he named in verses 7-12. All these things, and in fact "all things," were for the sake of their hearers. The apostles worked in a unified way, forsaking their own selves to ensure that grace would abound to the many who received it.

In turn, and at the reception of such abundant grace, the many would then show forth thanksgiving "to the glory of God." The mental picture his words make shows heartfelt appreciation by Paul that all of the many ordeals he and the other apostles faced were worth the effort. When his hearers glorified God through thanksgiving, the feeling of death working in them was worth the life working in their hearers. The words of 1 Corinthians 3 may have been on his mind as he conveyed these thoughts in this second epistle -

"Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. ²³ And you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is* God's."

-1 Corinthians 3:21-23

As a side note, there are numerous ways that translators have chosen to structure this verse. Is the word "abound" tied to "grace" or is it tied to "thanksgiving?" What tense should the "abound" be rendered? Each decision changes the meaning slightly. However, despite the disagreements, the general idea remains. The apostles worked for the sake of others, grace was involved and shared, it permeated to their hearers, and thanksgiving was the result which thus glorified God.

Life application: If you encounter difficulties in your life as you attempt to share the gospel, look at those trials as badges of merit when your efforts are successful. In the end, if a soul is saved and he in turn glorifies and thanks God for his salvation, then you have been a part of that. The final result is that all should be to the glory of God. As He is in control of all things, He has honored you with trials in order to perfect you while also bringing others to Himself in the process.

Lord God! How good it is when my hardships result in someone else turning to You. I may be inconvenienced in some way in order to make the gospel known, but when it is received, how can I look back and say "It wasn't worth it"? Of course it was! And so why should I worry about any difficulty that comes as I share the knowledge of Christ? If one human soul is worth more than all the riches of earth, then whatever I do towards their salvation is worth it. With this knowledge, I shall press on. Amen.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward *man* is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16

Here Paul returns to the thought of the first verse of this chapter -

"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart." 2 Corinthians 4:1

In the ministry they received mercy and in this they were able to remain steadfast. To continue with that thought after discussing the continuous challenge to their lives for the sake of that gospel ministry, he now says, "Even though our outward *man* is perishing..." This is what he has been alluding to, particularly in verses 7-11. They had faced many trials and death was always at hand, and "yet the inward man is being renewed day by day."

The physical body was continuously degrading and would eventually end, but the spiritual man in them was growing more in the likeness of Christ with each passing day. And so, it was understood that the daily death they lived was only a temporary thing which was ultimately leading to eternal life.

An analogy to hopefully make this understandable would be taking a massive amount of fill which contains precious ore and passing it through a purification process. As the fill (the outward man) is taken away, the ore (the inward man) is coming more and more into focus. At first there was tons of dirt. Eventually there is a pile of unrefined gold. From there, the gold is placed in a furnace and it melts. Eventually it is brought out and

the impurities are skimmed off. This is repeated until there is only the purest of gold left.

Paul and the other apostles (and we who are in Christ) are being refined, even in a body which is impure and perishing with time. But inside of us, because of Christ, is something pure and wonderful. As we are renewed day by day we are molded more and more into His image until only that which is perfect is left.

Life application: Let us never tire of striving to learn about Christ, to pursue Christ, and to emulate Christ. In so doing, a marvelous change is taking place which will have an eternal glory associated with it.

Heavenly Father, as the impurities of my life are removed, I am being molded into the image of Your Son. Help me to continuously strive to learn more about Him and then to put that knowledge into emulation of Him. Keep me from going backwards. Instead help me to keep my eyes fixed on Him, my heart attuned to Your wishes for me, and my mind ever striving to be conformed to His image. Thank You for guiding me in this most noble of goals. Amen.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, 2 Corinthians 4:17

Using language which is filled with beautiful expressions and contrasts, Paul now explains the words of the previous verse concerning the perishing outward man and the renewed inward man. He tells the Corinthians that "our light affliction" is "but for a moment." The idea of a light affliction is something that is troublesome without being overly burdensome. He is shrugging off the life of death which they live with words that say, "Heck, this is just temporary and not that bad at all."

In support of such a thought he says that it "is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Not only was the current state temporary and merely a "light affliction," it was serving a good purpose towards a glorious end. In their trials they were heading towards a time of magnificent wonder. The words he uses for "far more exceeding" are *hyperbolen eis hyperbolen* - "in excess unto excess." It is a superlative way of saying that what is a trial now can't even compare to the glory which lies ahead.

It should be noted how Paul's words contrast in the two clauses - "moment" with "eternal," "light" with "weight," and "affliction" with "glory." Further, the word "glory" to the Hebrew mind of Paul would have a higher meaning. It comes from another word

meaning "weightiness," and so he was most likely thinking of the surpassing glory which would make any weight in this life seem like nothing at all.

Paul's words of this verse are of comfort and reassurance in a world which is filled with trials and hardships. Despite what we often hear, Christians are not intended to be exempt from difficulties. We are not saved to "thrive" in any earthly sense. We are saved to continue on in this veil of trials and tears until the day we truly thrive in our new heavenly abode.

Life application: If the world seems to be over burdensome, remember that no matter what you face, it is incomprehensibly light in comparison to the majestic glory which lies ahead. Everything here is temporary and passing, but because of the promises of God in Christ we have a permanent and eternal joy set before us. Let us not be downhearted, but instead let us try to look for the gracious hand of God in all things, even the trials, which is directing us to that wondrous time ahead.

Heavenly Father, I know that this present life and all that it contains is passing away. And so why should I worry about the trials I face? Why should I struggle for wealth and possessions? Why should I strive for power or fame? Who cares! The world and those who belong to the world can have all of that. Me... I have Jesus and an exceedingly exceeding weight of glory awaiting me. I have an eternal hope and a home decorated by the hand of the Master. Nothing for me here! I am on my way to streets of gold and the water of life which flows on eternally. Amen.

...while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which *are* not seen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:18

In his words, Paul is looking ahead to the "eternal weight of glory" which he mentioned in the preceding verse. The present light afflictions that they faced are not what he and the other apostles were focused on, but rather their eyes were steadily fixed on what lies ahead. These light afflictions and all of the rest of this temporary earthly life are the "things which are seen." In contrast to them are "the things which are not seen." The Pulpit commentary describes it this way -

"The negative is the subjective negative. It expresses not only the fact that now these things are not seen, but that it is their nature to be unseen by the bodily eyes."

In other words, what they are looking to is a complete state of hope which resides in their spiritual minds' eye. This is the same expression that is given as the very definition of faith in the book of Hebrews -

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."
-Hebrews 11:1

Again, Paul's words reflect the same sentiment that he wrote to those in Rome -

"For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?" Romans 8:24

The "things which *are* seen" are those things which we encounter in this life. Be they good or be they evil, they are actually "temporary." And so, Paul questions the logic of focusing on that which is passing away. Instead, he would have us focus on "the things which *are* not seen." With our spiritual selves we should hope and even long for those things that Christ offers which are "eternal."

This is why we are to conduct ourselves in holiness, and why we refrain from worrying about pains, ills, or persecutions. All of these things will pass and there is a far greater reward which lies ahead of us. Let us focus on such things!

Life application: Right now, we don't actually see Jesus. And yet, the Bible asks us to "fix our eyes on Jesus" in the book of Hebrews. This means that we are to look to the reward which lies ahead and to study and cherish His word now because it reveals those things to us. Let us fix our thoughts, hearts, and minds on Jesus!

Lord God Almighty, You have made "faith" our means of salvation and being declared righteous before You. Abraham looked up at the stars, believed Your promise, and was declared righteous. And this pattern follows through the entire Bible. Help me to be one of the greats, recorded in Your hall of fame. Help me to have even the faith of a mustard seed that I might be pleasing to You not just in salvation, but in every step I take. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

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. 2 Corinthians 5:1

In the last verse, which ended chapter 4, Paul spoke saying that "the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which *are* not seen are eternal." Building on that, he speaks words of absolute certainty. The hope of the resurrection isn't a "hoping hope" but rather a "certain hope." For this reason, he begins with "For we know..."

Paul isn't hoping that the things he is speaking of will come to pass. He has every certainty that they will. And that certain hope is concerning "our earthly house, *this* tent." This is in reference to the bodies we now possess. In other areas of the Bible, he equates them to "earthen vessels." Here he equates them to a "tent." Being a tent maker, his wording would be personal, both to him and to those who knew him.

But there is more than just Paul's words on this. The Bible is replete with the imagery of the tent being a picture of our present body. In John 1:14, it says -

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

The word "dwelt" is literally "tabernacled," as in a tent-dwelling. This stems from the Feast of Tabernacles of the Old Testament and points to the dwelling of Christ in human flesh as a "tent." Paul uses this same terminology to describe "our earthly house." In 1 Corinthians 15, particularly verses 35-54, he writes about our earthly bodies and our coming heavenly bodies. It is this same concept which he speaks of now, noting that if the earthly is destroyed, "we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The word used to describe our earthly body being destroyed is *katalythe*. It carries the literal idea of "...loosened down. Appropriate to taking down a tent" (Vincent's Word Studies). When our current "tent" is no longer acceptable for use (meaning at our death or at the rapture), God has an eternal house ready for us. It is wonderful news and it is a sure guarantee because it is a part of God's word.

Life application: We currently reside in temporary dwellings which break down, get old, and eventually come to an end, but God promises us bodies that will never wear out. We don't yet know what they will be like, but they are prepared by God to last forever,

so they will be marvelously wonderful. In your times of sickness or sadness, don't lose hope! Something far better lies ahead.

Heavenly Father, Your word says that all who have received Jesus Christ will receive a body which will be eternal. Personally, I can't wait for that. This tent I'm living in now seems to have more problems every day. I long to be clothed in the new house that You have prepared for me that will never tire, never break down, and never get frustrated. Anytime is ok with me. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 2 Corinthians 5:2

"For" builds upon verse 1 as Paul continues to show the state we are in now and the anticipation of what lies ahead. "In this" is speaking of the "earthly house" which he also calls a "tent." Our current bodies are temporary and earthly. Because of this, they are susceptible to corruption and decay. In this state "we groan." Paul uses this thought elsewhere, such as in Romans 8 -

"For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body." Romans 8:22, 23

Our "eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" of Romans 8 is the same idea as "desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven" found here.

The "habitation" that he speaks of is the Greek word *ependuomai*. It is found only here and in verse 4 of this chapter and it indicates an outer covering. It is comparable to the *ependutes*, or "outer garment," found in John 21:7 -

"Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea."

The idea that we may draw from Paul's words is that our current "tent" is temporary and not what was originally intended for man. Instead, it is a part of the fallen creation and is actually in an unnatural state. Our true and intended state "is from heaven" and will be pure, eternal, and exceedingly glorious in comparison to what we now have.

It is significant that Peter's actions in John 21:7 come after the resurrection of Christ and they are specifically noted by John, thus indicating a picture for us to see. He was fishing in an "unclothed state" but when he heard it was the Lord waiting for them, he put on his outer garment that he might not be naked any longer. It is a connection that will continue to be seen in the verses ahead.

Life application: This body isn't how we are supposed to be. It is failing and temporary. Instead, we have a far better body awaiting us. As this is so, why should we degrade ourselves now with the temporary lusts of life when everything connected to it will perish? Let us act in holiness now as we await that which is truly holy, and in which we will be clothed for eternity.

Lord God, I am in eager anticipation of what lies ahead for Your redeemed. There is a glory that we cannot even imagine yet. I ache for the body which will never break down, never get tired, and never desire to sin against You. As this current body is temporary, help me to use it in a manner which glorifies You as I await the home which is truly my home. And may that day be really soon! Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

...if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 2 Corinthians 5:3

There are several things to consider here. Paul has been speaking of our "earthly house" which he calls a "tent." There is a time, except for those who are alive at the rapture, when we will die and that body will go into corruption. At that time, the soul will be "naked." In other words, it will still exist, but it will be without a body. This verse then implies that we were intended to be a soul/body unity. This is the doctrine of anthropological hylomorphism - man is a soul/body unity.

In Genesis 2:7, God created man out of the dust and breathed into him the breath of life. He is therefore matter (dust) and soul (the animated breath) combined. In the Bible, the soul can mean a person without a body. For example in Acts 2 we see this -

"Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, ³¹ he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption." Acts 2:30, 31

But the soul can also be speaking of a dead body, such as in Leviticus 22:4. If there was no soul/body unity, then the killing of a body (murder) wouldn't be wrong, but it is

because when a man is murdered, he is deprived of his physical being which is tied to his soul. And finally, the concept of a "resurrection" would be illogical if we were complete without a body. Instead, we would be "naked" as Paul's words imply here. This is why Paul so carefully describes our resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.

Again, in Job 10, Job speaks of his soul as a body that is animated and he describes the various things which that imply. There and elsewhere in the Bible, we see that grief of the soul affects the body and that pains of the body distress the soul.

Also, as a precedent in the Bible for an interim spiritual state without a real body, you can go to 1 Samuel 28 and see that even though Samuel had an appearance and that he could speak and hear, he is clearly identified as a "spirit" in verse 28:13. In other words, he was a soul without a body despite having abilities such as hearing and speaking.

All these tie in with what Paul has been speaking about and what he will continue to describe. We have a body now which is temporary and there will be a time when that is set aside because of death. However, our soul will live on. At some point, that unnatural state will be corrected when we will have "been clothed." This is the new, glorified body that God has prepared for those who have received Jesus. At this time, "we shall not be found naked." In fact, in 1 John 3, we are told that we shall be like Christ Jesus -

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." 1 John 3:2

Life application: Taken as a whole, the lesson of the Bible is that what we are now is temporary and that it will go into corruption at our death, but our soul will live on in an unintended state. However, God will give us an eternal body at some point. It will never wear out and it will be glorious. Don't let the pains of this life wear you out to hopelessness, and don't let the thought of death consume you with fear. Instead, know that God has everything under control and what He has planned for us will be glorious.

Lord God, I just love the promises of the Bible that tell me there is a better life yet ahead. You have told us that someday we will be like Jesus in His resurrection. With this great hope in my heart, even the temporary pains of this life cannot ruin my joy. And the thought of death brings no panic to me at all. No fear here... I have an eternal hope which is rooted in the promises of Your word. Praise Jesus who went before us and has prepared the way for His faithful! Amen.

For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

2 Corinthians 5:4

Paul continues to expand upon the same thought which he has been speaking about since verse 1. "We who are in *this* tent" is speaking of all saved believers in Christ who are still alive. Those who have died have put off their current tent and are awaiting the call of the resurrection which is seen in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. There it says that "the dead in Christ will rise first." However, those who are still alive "groan, being burdened."

This is our current state. We have pains and trials and we know that because of Christ there is something far better which lies ahead. But this isn't just Christians. In Romans 8:22, Paul says -

"For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."

However, though all creation groans, for the believer there is the sure hope of something better ahead. We look to the resurrection and we anticipate our time ahead when we shall also participate in it. Now, we struggle in this life because our body is temporary and corrupt. Again, Paul says in Romans 7:24 -

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

-Romans 7:24

Therefore, our groaning is in hope, "not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life." To be "unclothed" means to die and be rid of this corrupt body. Someone without the hope of Jesus may desire this state. For example, someone who commits suicide may simply want to be done with life. In ending their life, their groaning will hopefully end. But in Christ, there is more than just the hope of ending pain. Rather, there is the hope of being "further clothed."

We look forward to a new life in a new body that is far better than what we now possess. Because Jesus has gone before us, and because we are promised to be like Him in His resurrection, then we desire that additional state rather than just to put off this mortal, corruptible body. This is the assured difference between those who do not know Christ and those who do. We have the solid hope "that mortality may be swallowed up by life." This corresponds perfectly with Paul's words of 1 Corinthians 15 -

"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" 1 Corinthians 15:54

For Christians, the path doesn't end at death. Instead, it continues on with new and everlasting garments. And Paul's words here imply that he believed that he may actually be alive when the Lord returned. Two points to consider on that are:

1. Even since the earliest times in the church, there was the eager anticipation of the Lord's return.
2. The concept of a "rapture" was understood, not misunderstood, by those who waited for their change. Paul's words clearly show that this event was expected by believers. Thus, it was not a late "invention" which came through dispensational theologians.

As a final note, Paul's words here closely resemble the apocryphal writings of the Wisdom of Solomon -

"...for a perishable body weighs down the soul,
and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind." Wisdom of Solomon 9:15

It is believed by some that Apollos, Paul's friend mentioned in Acts, 1 Corinthians, and Titus may have been the author of this book.

Life application: We have a sure hope of a better, eternal body which is superior in all ways to the one we now have. Be content to live this life knowing that whatever you are facing in physical trials, you will never face them again when you are given your new and eternal home. God has lovingly prepared something wonderful for you.

Lord, thank You for the promises of Your word which tell us that this mortal life will be swallowed up with immortality. I know this will come in the twinkling of an eye and the change will be both immediate and complete. And I know this with all certainty because Jesus has gone before me and Your word says that because I have received Him, He will receive me. What a sure promise I possess. Thank You for this wonderful hope! Amen.

Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 2 Corinthians 5:5

It's truly amazing how many believers in Christ, and unfortunately pastors and theologians in particular, can't simply read these words and accept them at face value. Because of this, there is much stress and anxiety among many who have received Christ as Lord and Savior. The reason for this will be detailed as we go along.

First however, we look to Paul's words, "Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God." This is speaking of what he said in the previous verse which spoke of our being clothed in our heavenly body "that mortality may be swallowed up by life." It is God who prepared this wondrous abode for each person who has called out to Jesus Christ in faith. And further, it is God "who has also given us the Spirit as a guarantee."

It can't be certain what part of the word "guarantee" is misunderstood by so many, but apparently the word isn't clear enough to avoid confusion. The word translated here as "guarantee" is *arrabon* and is a transliteration from the Hebrew word *eravon* which is used three times in the Old Testament, all in Genesis 38.

The Greek word is found three times in the New Testament as well, all from Paul's hand - in 2 Corinthians 1:22, 2 Corinthians 5:5, and Ephesians 1:14. It means "an earnest, earnest-money, a large part of the payment, given in advance as a security that the whole will be paid afterwards." More specifically HELPS Word Studies says it is "an installment; a deposit ("down-payment") which guarantees the balance (the full purchase-price)."

What Paul means in each instance of its use is that at the moment we receive Jesus Christ we are "sealed" with the Holy Spirit. It is a "guarantee" that we have been saved. Because of this, it is beyond the pale that many seminaries, churches, pastors, and teachers claim that a person can "lose" his salvation. If this is true, then the guarantee that was made wasn't worth the seal which accompanied it. In other words, it calls into question the very truthfulness of God.

The doctrine which teaches that a person can "lose" their salvation calls into question the reliability of God, the truthfulness of His word, and it completely diminishes the work which Christ wrought on behalf of those who have believed. Further, it is bondage to those who are held in this misguided belief because they can never know just how good they need to be to "remain saved." Thus their pastor can wield control over them as he practices his flawed theology, causing them unnecessary anxiety and harm.

Life application: Jesus Christ saves. When He saves, He is fully capable of ensuring we remain saved - despite ourselves. Don't call God's word into question because of your

personal failings. He knew you would fail and counted that into the equation when He first saved you.

Heavenly Father, there is one sure truth that I have gleaned from Your word - I am saved. Your word says that when I received Jesus I was sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise and that He is a guarantee. I don't know what anyone else thinks "guarantee" means, but when it comes from You, I know it means - "deal done." Thank You for eternal salvation wrought by Christ on my behalf. I rest in His work. Amen.

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:6

Verse 6 is an unfinished sentence in the Greek. It picks up with the same verb (are confident) in verse 8 with its continuing thought while verse 7 is bracketed by the two. The Greek word for "are confident" shows the unswerving nature of those who have a firm hope in what lies ahead for the believer. Paul and the apostles had such confidence and so they pressed on. He says, "...knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord."

In this statement he uses two words which are only found in this chapter -

- *endémeó* - It is used three times in verses 6, 8, and 9 - It means "properly, be present (*at home*), as amongst one's own type of (kindred, related) people."
- *ekdémeó* - It is also used three times in the same verses, 6, 8, and 9 - It means "being absent" and "portrays believers who are still alive as being 'away from home' (heaven), i.e., because still living in a *mortal, physical* body."

While we are in this body, we are not in our true homeland. With our calling on Jesus Christ, we became adopted sons of God and have a new, heavenly home which we belong to. However, until we die or are raptured up, we are living away from this true home, being "absent from the Lord." At some point, we will be reunited in our true home, but until then we are to be confident that we are where we should be. The Lord will determine when our homecoming will be.

Life application: Although we live in this world, we are not truly of this world. This is why Christians are often perceived as a threat or a nuisance. When we truly believe that this isn't our home and act accordingly, then we demonstrate that we are strangers to those around us. People generally shun strangers in one way or another. And as the world

continues to push God out of their lives, we can only expect to be further alienated from those around us. Let us cling fast to the truth that we have a better, heavenly home which awaits us.

Lord God, since I received Jesus, You have accepted me as Your adopted child. That means that I now have a heavenly home and an eternal promise ahead of me. And that means that this world is really no longer my home. As an alien here, I don't fit in with the ways of this world and that is becoming more pronounced as it steadily turns away from You. However, I won't lose heart. If the world comes against me, the only thing it can do is send me home to You... not a bad deal at all. I'm here until You're ready to receive me! Amen.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

The word "for" builds upon what was just said - "So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord." As we are "absent from the Lord" our walk is different than it would be if we were in His presence. The word "walk" denotes our conduct in this life. It is a metaphor used to indicate the things we do and how we do them.

This "walk" for the Christians is a walk of "faith." We have been saved by Christ and therefore, the conduct of our lives is to be for Him, emulating Him, telling others about Him, anticipating our being gathered to Him, etc. But as he said in the previous verse, at this time we are "absent from the Lord." Because of this, our walk is entirely one of faith, "not by sight."

The word "sight" doesn't mean the active sense of vision. Rather, it means "appearance." The word faith then is being contrasted with the time when we actually behold Jesus and our new heavenly home. We have never seen Him and we have never experienced heaven, and so our walk in this life is only in anticipation of those things. It is entirely a walk of faith. As the author of Hebrews says -

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."
-Hebrews 11:1

But in this walk of faith is a blessing in and of itself. In fact, the next verse in Hebrews says, "For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony" (Hebrews 11:2). We obtain a "good testimony" through walking in faith. Jesus confirmed this to the disciples when addressing Thomas after the resurrection -

“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed.” John 20:29

Life application: Lots of people have claimed to have seen Jesus, and lots of people have claimed to have gone to heaven. This is contrary to what the Bible teaches. If someone has experienced one of these things, then their walk is no longer of faith. And so, we must decide to either believe the Bible or believe them. Though many have seemed convincing about having experienced these things, it is better we reject their stories and accept that we do, in fact, live by faith and not by sight.

Lord God, I don't need to read the stories people have written about going to heaven or having talked to Jesus. The Bible says that I am to live by faith and not by sight. That is good enough for me. I have researched Your word and I have the surest hope of all that what You have told us is sufficient for my faith and practice. The change in me testifies to this. I'll stick to Your word and not fancy stories which do nothing to enhance my walk with You! Amen.

We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8

This verse finishes the interrupted verse which began at 5:6. If taken together without the insert, they would say -

"So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ... We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

However, verse 7 was inserted as a very appropriate thought before coming to the words of verse 8. This verse literally reads, "...to be away from the home of the body, but to be at home with the Lord" (Pulpit Commentary). The change from "at home" to "present" in the translation began with William Tyndale and has been used since then.

The thought here is almost identical to that found in Philippians 1:21-25 (and particularly verse 23) with the exception that here he desires not to "depart" but rather to be done with the body without the need for dying. In other words, it is a strong case in and of itself for both the imminence of Christ's return (which Paul thought may even happen in his life), and for the doctrine of the rapture, which he clearly speaks of on several occasions in his epistles.

The idea conveyed in this verse is described by Charles Ellicott quite well -

“We are content,” he says, “if death comes before the Coming of the Lord, to accept death; for even though it does not bring with it the glory of the resurrection body, it does make us at home with Christ among the souls who wait for the resurrection.”

What this tells us is that if we die before the rapture, we will be "at home" with the Lord, but not in a glorified body. It is the resurrection which brings that about. Until then, our souls will be kept safely by the Lord as we await the glorious day when the trumpet sounds and we are changed.

Arguments for an "interim body" are not sound and there is nothing written by Paul to indicate such a state. The order is:

1. This present life;
2. Either death in this life or rapture;
 - If death, then our soul is "present" with Christ awaiting the resurrection body, or
 - If rapture, we translate directly from this life to the next in the twinkling of an eye.

Life application: The doctrine of the rapture is so clearly stated in Scripture that if you dismiss it, you have been misapplying Scripture. Remedy: Stop misapplying Scripture.

Heavenly Father, I have a blessed hope which I anticipate might be soon. It says that at some point the church age will end and those who have received Christ and have died will be raised to new and eternal life. And for those who are alive at His coming... well that will be pretty wonderful - they will be changed in the blink of an eye. I could do without the death part if that time is near, but if not, I will just be content to go off and be present with the Lord. Either way, it is a win-win situation. Thank You for my blessed hope because of Jesus. Amen.

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.
2 Corinthians 5:9

"Therefore" is given as a summary of his thoughts from the beginning of the chapter. He has been speaking of being alive in this earthly body and also of dying - at which time we

will receive our eternal, heavenly body. In order to describe either state he says, "...whether present or absent." The Greek here literally reads, "...whether at home or away from home." To be "at home" means to be with Christ, to be "away from home" means to be separated from Him, as we currently are.

Regardless of our state, he says that "we make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to Him." The idea is that we should strive with all diligence to be pleasing to the Lord. It should be our one and only ambition. This was the life of the apostle and it should be our desire as well. In our current existence, we have to really work at this. Trials, fatigue, stress, and so much more gets in our way of accomplishing this, but through constant prayer and the fixing of our eyes on Him, we are enabled to do so.

Life application: What is it that motivates you? We tend to exert the majority of our energy and our time on that which we find most important. If it is the Lord, then you will exert these things in order to be pleasing to Him. This doesn't mean that this is done at the expense of other things, such as work. Rather, it means that we will incorporate Jesus into our other tasks. Our life will become a "living sacrifice" to Him as we earnestly strive to be pleasing to Him.

Lord God Almighty! It sure is good to know that You are always with me, tending to me in my frail human weaknesses. I get tired, I get frustrated, and I get worn down by those who are more and more at enmity with You each day. But in You, I have a place of rest, a place of calm, and a place of reinvigoration. You sent Jesus to show the way to Your heart and in receiving Him, I was sealed with Your Spirit. I stand ready for the day ahead and all that it entails because of this wonderful relationship! Thank You, O God. Amen.

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.

2 Corinthians 5:10

The words here should be perfectly understandable on their surface. The verse is not speaking to unbelievers at all. They will receive a different judgment, one of condemnation. The judgment of this verse is one of salvation.

Paul notes that "we must all," meaning all believers, "appear before the judgment seat of Christ." This is the Bema Seat of Christ. In Greek *bema* indicates "an elevated place ascended by steps, a throne, tribunal." Charles Ellicott notes that –

It "is the tribunal of the Roman magistrate, raised high above the level of the basilica, or hall, at the end of which it stood. The word was transferred, when basilicas were turned into churches, to the throne of the bishop, and in classical Greek had been used, not for the judge's seat, but for the orator's pulpit."

At the time of Paul's writing though, it had the original Roman sense of being the place of a tribunal. This is what each Christian will face. And the reason is "that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." As noted, this is not a judgment for either salvation or condemnation. That was determined when the individual received Jesus by faith. As Paul notes about every person who is in Christ -

"And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." Romans 8:10, 11

The judgment which Paul speaks of here is one of works, done in the body, while in Christ. He speaks of this same judgment in 1 Corinthians 3 -

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

At that time we shall stand before the Lord and He will search us out. This will be a complete evaluation, right down to the motives of the heart. Nothing will be overlooked and the thought of divine reckoning is an appropriate way of explaining what will occur. He has saved us; we will be evaluated based on what we have done with that salvation; and we will be judged according to how we responded to it in our Christian life.

The same word translated as "appear" in this verse is translated as "reveal" in 1 Corinthians 4:5 –

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

In other words, the secret things of the heart will not be unknown to the Lord. His evaluation will search us out completely and it is with this judgment that we will receive our eternal rewards or losses. And with all certainty, there will be a standard by which we will be judged. It will not be arbitrary or unfair, but it will be perfectly just and righteous. For those who have adhered to His word, there will be reward; for those who have disobeyed it, there will be loss.

Nobody will be able to complain that their judgment was unfair. And all will be satisfied with the results of the judgment they receive.

Life application: Oh how shallow we are to trade heaven's riches for temporary gain. The word has been given and we have been asked to pursue it and adhere to it. How many stand in disobedience to it, supposing that their dismissal of what He has spoken will be ignored. Let us not be so small-minded when we contemplate the Lord who judges.

Heavenly Father, I know that every person who has received Christ will stand before Him and give an account for the deeds they have done while in the body. I know also that Your word has been given now to direct us in our walk so that we can have a good reward if we adhere to it. How shallow we are to suppose that our judgment will be based on something other than what You have already revealed. Help me to pursue You through Your word, understanding that it is my standard for Your evaluation of my life. Amen.

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. 2 Corinthians 5:11

In the previous verse Paul noted that all believers will "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." This is judgment for the saved, not the lost. Understanding this, the word *phobos* which is translated here as "terror" is not what Paul is conveying.

Rather, the word should be rendered as "fear." *Phobos* "is commonly used in Scripture – sometimes positively (in relation to God) but more often negatively of *withdrawing from* the Lord (His will)" (HELPS Word Studies). Christians, knowing that their judgment lies ahead, are to have a reverential fear and awe at the strictness by which they will be judged. However, "terror" is not a part of this judgment. In Christ, there is no condemnation.

With that in mind, we should each know that we will, in fact, be judged according to what we have done and we should therefore be on guard to act in a right and proper manner at all times. It is because of this coming judgment that Paul and the other apostles "persuade men." It was their desire that those who had called on Christ not let their guard down as if there were no judgment at all coming upon them.

And this lesson needs to be conveyed now by all who preach and teach the word. In many ways, the Christian world has come to believe that "getting saved" means that judgment is behind us and all is peachy between us and the Lord. Concerning salvation or condemnation that is true, but that is not the end of the matter.

To finish this thought, he writes that "we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences." Paul is not telling the Corinthians anything which contradicts their own status as apostles. They are not "saying one thing and doing another." Rather, what they have been imploring in others, they have lived out among themselves. This is confirmed by his words from the previous chapter -

"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."

-2 Corinthians 4:2

Life application: Getting saved is not the end of our responsibilities before the Lord. Rather, it is the beginning. We will all be judged when we stand before Him, and that judgment will be based on our adherence to His word (our instruction manual) from the time that we were saved. Are the losses of eternal rewards worth ignoring His guidelines?

Heavenly Father, I have noticed that fellow believers often assume that once they are saved their judgment is behind them. I would pray for anyone who feels this way to reflect on what Your word says. Getting saved isn't the end of our responsibilities to Christ, it is the beginning. Eternity is a long time and our judgment for rewards will be based on our Christian walk now. Help me to relay this to others so that they will receive reward and not loss on that great Day. Amen.

For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. 2 Corinthians 5:12

Based on his words of the previous verse, his detractors could say, "There he goes again, boasting about himself as one of the apostles!" But this isn't the case. It is a continuation of the defense he made all the way back in Chapter 3 -

"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you? ² You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³ clearly you are 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."

-2 Corinthians 3:1-3

There was no need for self-commendation because those in Corinth who came to Christ and who were then schooled in Christ testified to their apostolic ministry. Now he takes that thought and offers it to them to "give you opportunity to boast on our behalf." If the Corinthians are their "epistle" then they should feel free to make a boasting of them. Thus, there was no need for Paul and the others to commend themselves. Again, this is something he already addressed to them at the beginning of the letter -

"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. ¹³ For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end ¹⁴ (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."

-2 Corinthians 1:12-14

To complete the thought of this verse, he says that their boasting is so "that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart." The term "in appearance" is literally "in face." The work of Paul and the other apostles was written on the heart, whereas the work of the others was external. They boasted of their eloquence, superior knowledge, the names of their schools, or whatever other external signs of their greatness. Paul will speak of these people directly later in the epistle. They were superficial and they were false teachers.

Life application: Paul had personal defects, he wasn't known as an eloquent speaker, and he certainly wasn't flashy. Instead, he made tents to support himself and shared the gospel freely to all. Those who opposed him may have been visually appealing and very well-spoken, but they missed what was important - holding fast to God's word. Now think of those in the world today - whom would you rather trust with the message of

your eternal destiny? Does a flashy presentation really matter all that much when put in this perspective?

Heavenly Father, please help those who are seeking You to look past the externals of eloquence, physical ability, and flashy presentations. Instead, I would pray that they would seek out those who hold fast to Your word regardless of their physical appeal or exceptional speaking abilities. Trading sound doctrine for ear-appeal is not a very good deal when one considers that eternal rewards and even salvation itself are at stake. Open hearts to Your word alone! Amen.

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you.
2 Corinthians 5:13

This continues Paul's thought of the previous verse. To the Corinthians, he said that he wanted to "give you opportunity to boast on our behalf." How could they do this? Paul explains that when charges are leveled against him as an apostle, they could use the argument in this verse.

It appears that some had said that he and the other apostles were either nuts or at least on their way to the funny farm. This is what he means by "beside ourselves." It is a charge that was made against Paul in Acts 26 -

"Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!'" Acts 26:24

Even more, it is a charge that was levied against the Lord. Two such examples follow -

"Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. ²⁰ And many of them said, 'He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?'"
-John 10:19, 20

"Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. ²¹ But when His own people heard *about this*, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'" Mark 3:20, 21

Paul says now that if they were beside themselves, it was "for God." In other words, their zeal was so strong for upholding the truth of God that others may say they were out of their minds.

On the other hand, for those who understood their position and their zeal, they knew that they were of "sound mind." And if of sound mind, it was for the sake of those they ministered to. Therefore, they could easily defend Paul and the other apostles, being given this opportunity to boast on their behalf - "He isn't nuts, except about Jesus! He isn't crazy, but if he is, it is about the gospel. He is as right as rain."

Life application: Do you know someone who is a bit eccentric and yet is totally sold out to the Lord? Let the eccentric be overlooked; there is genius behind the zeal for Christ.

Heavenly Father, I often wonder if I'm a bit nuts. And the answer is "Yes, I am nuts for Jesus." I sometimes wonder if I am looked at as a bit off my rocker. And the answer is, "Yes, I jumped out of that to praise the Lord." And at times, people say that I should be committed. They forget that I already am; I am committed to You. No shame here! I am on fire for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord, Hallelujah, and Amen!

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 2 Corinthians 5:14

There is an ambiguity in the first portion of this verse so that it could read, "For the love of Christ compels us," or "For our love for Christ compels us." However, on numerous occasions in Paul's writings, he speaks of God's love for us, so the former is probably the correct rendering (e.g., see Romans 5:5; Romans 8:35; 1 Corinthians 16:24; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

As Paul notes, it is this great love which "compels us." It is the motivating factor which impelled him and the other apostles forward. And the reason why is because of understanding the significance of what Christ's love means, thus the words rendered as "because we judge this." They judged the importance of what Christ did and were therefore compelled forward, knowing that their ministry was the only thing between those they encountered and salvation or condemnation. This is reflected in the words, "...that if One died for all, then all died."

Christ died a substitutionary death. He did not die for His own sins, but for the sins of the world. However, in order for those sins to be forgiven, the message of Christ must be transmitted to people. When they hear and believe, then they are granted forgiveness through His death. The words "then all died" indicate that whoever (they are potential, not actual, until received) receives Christ "dies" with Him. This is reflected elsewhere in Paul's writings, such as -

"For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:19, 20

In Christ, we die to sin; it no longer has mastery over us. At that time, the life we live is lived to God and we are no longer held by the power of the devil. This is the message which so compelled the apostles, urging them forward in order to bring many to a saving knowledge of what God did in Christ for the people of the world.

Life application: How important are the souls of those you encounter to you? If you are the only person they will meet who could bring them to Christ and you fail to speak, they will face a vastly different fate than they may otherwise have faced if you had simply spoken. Don't withhold the wonderful message of reconciliation!

Lord, I may be the only person to have the right opportunity to personally speak to someone about Jesus in their whole life. If I speak, there may be a chance of him hearing and believing. If I keep silent, the promise of eternal life will fade from his possible future... all because I was too timid to simply open my mouth and share the life-giving news. What a burden to carry for all eternity. Help me to be bold and to share what Jesus has done with each person I meet. Grant me this burning desire, O God! Amen.

...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. 2 Corinthians 5:15

This is a further explanation of the words, "For the love of Christ compels us..." As Jesus Christ "died for all," he now explains "that those who live should no longer live for themselves."

Jesus Christ "died for all" potentially, but He actually only died for the elect. Those who have received Jesus Christ are the elect according to God's foreknowledge. In other words, God knew that they would receive Him and therefore Jesus has saved them. While they live, they "should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again."

This explains why the apostles didn't go out making a lot of money off sharing the gospel. It explains why they were willing to suffer persecution and hardship. It explains why they were willing to give all for the sake of Christ. Paul is saying that all believers should have a like-attitude. We may have a job and a family, but we are to put Christ

above all else. He isn't asking us to give up everything we have, but to live our lives in the proper, Christ-centered, perspective.

He gives this same sentiment elsewhere in his writings several times. One example is found in Romans 6 -

"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:8-11

The apostle Peter also shared this same sentiment -

"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² that he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." 1 Peter 4:1, 2

Life application: Christ died and rose for us so that we could truly live. Therefore, let us truly live for Him!

Heavenly Father, I know that Christ the Lord died for me... even me. I am alive because of His death. How then can I not live for Him? All that I have should be an offering of gratitude to Your precious Son for having lifted me out of the pit of death. He placed me among the living. O God, as He died and rose again for me, give me the desire now to live my days for Him. Amen!

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.
2 Corinthians 5:16

"Therefore" is given to have us think about what has been stated thus far and as a lead into a full explanation of that information. Paul has noted that "if One died for all, then all died." He then noted that "He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again."

These words give the basis for the "therefore." Because of our having died with Christ, we should, "from now on," have a different attitude towards others. Instead of seeing

them as simply people whom we interact with by using normal human motives, we should "regard no one according to the flesh." We are to no longer make superficial judgments but are rather to regard other believers as those for whom Christ died.

We have died with Him and we should live for Him. Our judgment of others is to be based on our spiritual relationship with Him. In other words, we shouldn't look at and regard a person because they are famous, because of their status in society, because of their amount of wealth, because of their color, or because of any other external reason. Instead, we should view all people based on their relationship to Christ. Our regard of others is not "according to the flesh" but according to who they are in a new, spiritual way.

To show us what he means, he next says, "Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer." There was a time when Paul saw Christ as a mere human. His idea of who Christ should be was a conquering king over an earthly kingdom. Others may have seen Christ as a great scientist or a man of great philosophical wisdom. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses see Christ as a created being and not the Lord God.

Whatever carnal, fleshly way we once saw Christ, if we are truly "in" Christ, we no longer know Him in this way. Instead, we see Him as our Lord. We regard Him as the One to whom we are to fix our hopes, our goals, our aspirations, and our eyes upon. Paul once viewed Christ as a dead person whose followers needed to be destroyed, but then he encountered the risen Christ and that all changed.

His words about Christ show that our attitude should also be different concerning His followers. We are to regard them first and foremost as saved believers, spiritually reborn and valued children of God because of the work of Jesus. This idea can be beautifully seen in the slave Onesimus. Paul writes these words about him in Philemon -

"For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord."

-Philemon 1:15, 16

Though he was still a slave in the flesh, Paul asked his master to regard him as "a beloved brother." In Christ, all things are new. This is what Paul is relaying to us in his words today.

Life application: Who do you show more regard for in your congregation - the handsome, wealthy, or powerful? Rather than looking at externals, let us regard other believers first and foremost from their position in Christ. Let us look at them as valued brothers and sisters with whom we will spend eternity.

Lord God, please grant me a heart to not look at my fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord based on externals, but on who they truly are. Keep me from showing preference to others because they are wealthy, powerful, good looking, or whatever else might be contrary to their devotion to You. Help me to make their love of You my highest reason for desiring their friendship. I know that in Christ, all are on a level playing field when it comes to the things of the world. And so, help me to look beyond those things! Amen.

Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17

"Therefore" builds upon the thought (which was also a "therefore") from the previous verse. Paul continues to expand on the meaning of our new life in Christ. In order to do so, he says that "if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation." Being "in" Christ comes by faith in Him. This is the thought of Romans 10:9. When we believe, we are saved. At that moment, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit according to Ephesians 1:13, 14. This is our "baptism of the Holy Spirit." It is a one-time occurrence upon belief in Christ.

From that moment, we are "a new creation." God positionally sets us in the heavenly places at that moment (as noted in Ephesians 2:6) showing that salvation is a "done deal." The concept of eternal salvation permeates Scripture. Verses such as 2 Corinthians 5:17, when looked at objectively, can mean nothing other than this. To assume that we are a "new creation" and yet could suddenly become unsaved is unfathomable.

From the moment we are saved "old things have passed away." In the Greek, there is an article in front of "old things" and so it should be rendered, "the old things." The things that we were once identified with are no longer applicable to us. This does not mean that we have attained perfection or that many saved people won't choose enormously bad paths to follow. Rather, this is speaking of how we are considered from God's perspective.

In Him, "all things have become new." This is a shadowy mirror of the words of Isaiah 43

"Do not remember the former things,
Nor consider the things of old.
¹⁹ Behold, I will do a new thing,
Now it shall spring forth;
Shall you not know it?" Isaiah 43:18, 19

Because Paul says here that we are "a new creation," it is an act of God, not of man. Only God can create. Thus, what man does after this moment is irrelevant to the status of the person. He is created anew by God and therefore what man does no longer has any bearing on the new creation. Paul alludes to this in Galatians 6 -

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." Galatians 6:15

It is God who makes new; it is God who seals His redeemed; and it is God who will continue to save them until they are brought into His presence. The finality of the decision is His and, once again, it shows quite clearly the doctrine of eternal salvation. As Solomon notes in Ecclesiastes 3 -

"I know that whatever God does,
It shall be forever.
Nothing can be added to it,
And nothing taken from it.
God does *it*, that men should fear before Him." Ecclesiastes 3:14

Life application: By a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ, a person moves from Adam to Christ. We are saved by God and become a new creation. Concerning salvation, we cannot add to what He has done, nor will what He has done be taken from us. Therefore, let us live our lives for Him, knowing that our eternal rewards and losses are based on the lives we live from the moment of our salvation.

Heavenly Father, just as You created all things, Your word says that when we receive Christ as Lord we become a new creation in Him. As only You can create, then this surely means that we are forever Yours because of His work. I cannot imagine the trade! All of my past life is washed away by the work of Another. I am new, pure, and undefiled in Your eyes because of Jesus. What a blessing to know that heaven isn't up to me. I am saved, once and for all, by faith alone. Hallelujah and Amen.

Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:18

Bible scholar Charles Ellicott notes: "The presence of the article in the Greek indicates that he is speaking, not of the universe at large, but of the new things belonging to the new creation of which he had spoken in the previous verse."

In other words, this verse cannot be used for the doctrine of "universal salvation" as if God has reconciled to Himself "all things" in the absolute sense. It is referring to "all things" that He has, in fact, reconciled which were mentioned in the previous verse. It is in this sense that God "has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ."

The word "reconciled" is used in three different passages in the New Testament, but only here and in Romans 5 is it speaking of the reconciliation which occurs between God and man through the work of Christ. In Romans 5:10, he states -

"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

In this, God is the one who primarily moves the process which is done through Christ His Son. In other words, without Christ there could be no reconciliation. But God accomplished this of His own accord in the giving of His Son. This then excludes any works on our part in the process. We simply receive the work by faith and the reconciliation is accomplished.

And in order for this to come about, Paul continues with the words that God "has given us the ministry of reconciliation." There is a difference in the use of the word "us" here. In the first use of it (...reconciled us to Himself) the word is in the accusative. Here (...given us the ministry) the word is in the dative. Again, Charles Ellicott provides clarity-

"It is obvious that the personal pronoun is used with a different extent in the two clauses: the first embracing, as the context shows, the whole race of mankind; the last limited to those who, like the Apostles, were preachers of the Word."

The message of the work of Christ has been given to man to spread. What a responsibility!

Life application: We were fallen and at enmity with God and yet God reached out in love to reconcile us to Himself. When so reconciled, we are considered acceptable in God's

eyes to such an extent that we are granted the right to tell this saving message to others. Let us never fail to open our mouths and speak! God has offered to this world the chance to go from condemned to saved... if we will but open our mouths and share the good news.

Heavenly Father, I am so grateful that You loved us enough to send Jesus to reconcile us to You. You initiated, You accomplished, and You have offered! All we need to do is simply reach out by faith and receive. And then You have granted us the right to tell others of the marvelous deeds which saved us. Help us to not be silent, but instead to be willing to speak out concerning the great things You have done for us. This I pray that I will be an acceptable instrument for sharing the good news with others. Amen.

...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.

2 Corinthians 5:19

The words "that is" are used to further clarify what was just written concerning the "ministry of reconciliation." This ministry involved a process which comes directly from the eternal and infinite mind of God. It is "that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Concerning the words "was" and "reconciling," Vincent's Word Studies notes that –

"These words are to be construed together; the participle with the finite verb marking the process of reconciliation. The emphasis is on the fact that God was reconciling, not on the fact that God was in Christ. God was all through and behind the process of reconciliation. The primary reference of the statement is, no doubt, to God's reconciling manifestation in the incarnation and death of Christ; yet, as a fact, it includes much more. God was engaged in reconciling the world from the very beginning, and that in Christ."

What Vincent says here shows the immense love of God for the objects of His affection. Despite His wrath at our sin, God looked beyond that and has worked since the very beginning of time to restore us to Himself. This is why all of the stories of the Bible are included. Each shows another step in the process of leading the world to Jesus. God has been reconciling us to Himself each step of the way.

Further, Paul explains that in this process, God has arranged these things for His people in a way that He is "not imputing their trespasses to them." For those who have received His offering of peace, we are not to be punished as we justly deserve. Instead,

God united with flesh in the Person of Jesus and took the punishment that we deserve upon Himself. Therefore, by this act, there is no longer an expectation of punishment and condemnation, but rather one of divine favor and reconciliation.

This also shows, quite clearly, why Jesus can claim that there is only one path to God, and it is through Him (see John 14:6). If the vicarious offering is not accepted, then only an expectation of wrath and condemnation remains. "The world" in this verse is speaking of humanity, but more specifically those who have received Jesus. For this reason, Charles Ellicott gives the translation as, "How that it was God who was reconciling in Christ a world unto Himself."

In other words, what God has done is for a group in this world who will become "a world unto Himself." Those who are not in this group will not receive of this benefit. This is why there needs to be apostles, preachers, and teachers of this word. If all people were being reconciled to God, then there would be no need for "the word of reconciliation." It would be a forgone conclusion that all were saved. But because there is a need for the word of reconciliation to be communicated, it shows that the communication of that word is a necessary part of the process. As Paul says in Romans 10:17, "...faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

It is the transmission of this message which God committed to the apostles that is now contained in the pages of the Bible. For those faithful preachers and teachers who follow after them, there is the burden of properly passing this message of hope on to the world.

Life application: If you are feeling weighed down by the troubles of the world, just take time to contemplate the message found in this verse. God has been working on a plan since the very beginning of time in order to reconcile you to Himself. That plan included the ministry, suffering, and death of Christ. If God went through all of that for you, then your time of trial has a purpose in that plan, and it will have an end as well. Be of good cheer and stand strong in your faith in Christ.

Heavenly Father, there are times when I feel completely overwhelmed by the troubles I face. But in those times, I can look to the truth that You have been in the world, reconciling us to Yourself from the very beginning. And that plan included the suffering and death of Christ Jesus. If You were willing to give Your Son for me, then whatever I am facing must be a part of that plan. And even more, I know that it is a temporary part of it. The day is coming when these things will be behind me... all because of Jesus! Thank You for what You have done, O God! Amen.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20

In the previous two verses, Paul has spoken of the "ministry of reconciliation" and the "word of reconciliation." Now, he combines those thoughts into this verse. He begins with "Now then..." The Greek word for this is *huper* and it "is usually best translated 'for the betterment (advantage) of,' i.e. focusing on benefit" (M. Vincent). In other words, "Because of the ministry which we have been given, we now relay the following which is for your benefit..." With that understood, he says that "we are ambassadors for Christ."

The word translated as "ambassadors" is used only twice in the New Testament, here and in Ephesians 6:20. It is *presbeuó* and it "means to act as an established statesman (diplomat) – a trusted, respected ambassador who is authorized to speak as God's emissary (represent His kingdom)" (HELPS Word Studies). In essence, Paul is saying that the message he and the apostles carry is as if Christ were personally speaking it.

This is the job of an ambassador. They are to convey the desire and intent of the one they represent, speaking in the stead of the one who appointed them. In the case of the apostles, they spoke "as though God were pleading through us." Without a doubt, and what can be taken in no other way based on his words here, is that there is nothing God needs to do concerning the matter which will be stated. Rather there is something that man must do. This is why Paul uses the term "pleading." It is as if God's hands were stretched out and asking for a response.

And the message that these ambassadors proclaim from God who is pleading through them is that "we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." If God need do nothing, and the burden is laid on the one being petitioned, then this verse shows with all certainty that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and election is false. They teach that God predestines some for salvation and some for condemnation and that free-will is not involved in the process. Based on Paul's words here, that is not only utterly ridiculous, it is dangerous.

Why would God "plead" through His ambassadors for man to be reconciled to Him if man was under no obligation to respond? Further, why would God plead this "on Christ's behalf?" What would the point of saying this be if Christ's work encompassed election apart from free-will? Such a doctrine does damage to the purpose of the cross of Christ, which was to provide atonement for all people potentially, based on their choice of being reconciled. If they refuse His offer, the atonement that was offered is withheld; if they receive it, it is granted.

Life application: Paul's words are clear and concise, and they are also consistent. Man has an obligation to respond to the gospel message of Christ. If he refuses the offer, there is no other way to be reconciled to God. Exercise your free will wisely. Choose Christ!

Heavenly Father, Your word says that the message of the apostles was spoken on Your behalf, as if You are pleading through them. It says that we have been implored, on Christ's behalf, to be reconciled to You. What is plainly clear from this is that I have a choice. I can either receive Christ and be reconciled to You, or I can refuse Him and be separated from You. I choose Christ! I choose life! Thank You for my Lord through whom I am saved. Amen.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21

From time to time, it is recommended by the commentator that a verse should be memorized and ready to be repeated at all times. This is one of them. In grasping the words of this verse, we find what the significance of the cross truly is. The order of the words in Greek shows an emphasis which is lacking in our translations - "Him that knew no sin He made sin for us."

God sent Jesus on a definite mission in order to redeem fallen man. He was born without inherited sin and He lived His life perfectly under the law, God's standard for man. This is testified to on numerous occasions in the New Testament, such as John 8:46, John 14:30, Hebrews 7:26, 1 Peter 2:22, etc. In being perfect and sinless, Jesus was thus qualified to become a sacrifice of atonement for those who otherwise had no hope.

It is important to note that the words "to be" are inserted by the translators, but are not in the Greek. Instead, it says "He (has) made Him sin." Does this merely mean a sin-offering, or does it literally mean He was made sin? The answer is to be found in the Old Testament sacrificial system.

An innocent animal was brought before the Lord and the offender laid his hands on it and confessed over the animal. In this act, the sin was transferred to the animal. Thus, the animal became not just the sin offering, but the sin itself. The transfer was made in accordance with the law and therefore God viewed the offender as having been purified and the animal as being sin-filled. The "sin-offering" does not mean that the sin was offered to God, but that the animal which was "the sin" was to be killed because "the

wages of sin is death." The life of the offender (the recipient of the transfer) was offered in order to remove the sin.

For this reason, the sin offering was to be wholly burnt; none of it was to be eaten. If the sin-offering was consumed, it would in essence be a "taking in again" of the sin which was transferred to the animal.

However, the book of Hebrews shows that this was only a picture of faith in the greater work of the Lord because, "...*it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). These Old Testament sacrifices only looked forward to the work of Christ. And this is exactly what Christ did for them (looking forward), and for us (looking backward) on the cross.

God sent Him on this mission - perfect, pure, and spotless. He went to the cross bearing sin - our sin. The transfer is from the offender to the innocent and so He literally became sin. As the "wages of sin is death," then He had to die in order for the sin which was transferred to Him to be removed. But something more incredible occurred. Because He had no sin of His own, He died not "in" sin, but "for" sin. Without His own sin, it was not possible for Him to remain dead (Acts 2:24). Thus, He rose from the dead.

Therefore, sin was judged in Him - our sin. Once such a judgment is rendered, it can never be made again. And so, an exchange was made at the cross. God made Him "sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." As our sin has been judged, then there is only righteousness left. In God's eyes, our sin - past, present, and future, has been judged in Christ. Without any sin, we have become the righteousness of God in Christ.

This concept spoken of here is similar to that of Galatians 3:13 -

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree") ...

The law stood against us and testified to our sinful state, but Christ who fulfilled the law condemned that sin through His marvelous work. Again, Paul speaks of this in Romans -

"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh..." Romans 8:3

This "righteousness of God" is something that we cannot do without if we are to be reconciled to Him. Either we possess it, or we can never enter into His presence. As Charles Ellicott notes –

"The 'righteousness of God,' as in Romans 3:21-22, expresses not simply the righteousness which He gives, nor that which He requires, though neither of these meanings is excluded, but rather that which belongs to Him as His essential attribute."

As incredible as it seems, Christ Jesus was seen as our sin there on Calvary's cross. At the same time, we were (and are even now) viewed as Christ's perfection. Because of His work, we take on a new nature in God's eyes.

Life application: Because God views us as sinless, isn't it right that we act as such? The cost of our sin was the life of our perfect, sinless Lord. As He died for us, let us endeavor to live for Him.

Heavenly Father, I cannot get my mind beyond the cross of Christ. Jesus went there for my sin, taking it upon Himself. And at the same time, I was given His righteousness. With that thought always before me, I would pray for the strength and the wisdom to live my life according to Your word, knowing that my coming judgment is not for salvation or condemnation, but for rewards based on my walk in Christ. As He died for me, help me to live for Him. This I pray that You will be glorified in this life I live. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

We then, *as workers together with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 Corinthians 6:1

Again, as in 2 Corinthians 5:20, this verse clearly demonstrates the incorrect theology of Calvinism which excludes free-will. One has to read right over such verses, ignoring their intent completely, in order to develop such an unsound systematic theology (which then isn't very systematic).

Paul begins the chapter with, "We then..." He is speaking of himself and the other apostles, as he has even from the first chapter of this epistle. As apostles and "*as workers together with Him*" his petition will be made. The words "with Him" are inserted, but they are implied based on the use of the compounded Greek *oun*, meaning "with" which is found in the word *synergountes*. The word *sunergeó* means "to work together" or "cooperate." Therefore, when compounded with *oun*, it means "to work together with."

The question some scholars debate is whether "Him" then refers to "God" or to "Christ." The reason for this debate is because "with" is certainly referring back to verse 20 of the previous chapter -

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:20

It is actually a bit silly to argue this, but for clarity we should analyze it. Paul said in this verse that the apostles are "ambassadors for Christ." An ambassador speaks for the one who sent them. However, it is "God" who is said to plead through the apostles. Therefore, either option is a possibility if one wants to divide Paul's thought into two different entities. But if we understand that Christ is God, then the debate is unnecessary. God is pleading through Christ, because Christ is God's revelation of Himself. Further, Paul says the same thing concerning God in the book of 1 Corinthians -

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building."
-1 Corinthians 3:9

Understanding that we, as the church, are "living stones" in this temple (1 Peter 2:5) and that the church is Christ's body (Ephesians 1:23), then we can see that these are ultimately one and the same. It then is the apostles, together with Him, who "also plead

with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain." The grace of God he is writing about can be nothing other than the message of salvation, the gospel. It is the message of pardon leading to reconciliation with God which is found in the sacrificial giving of Christ for fallen man.

And so, the question must be asked, "Why would God/Christ plead along with the apostles for us to 'not receive the grace of God in vain' if free-will were excluded from the equation?" One can see how dangerous this type of theology is. If someone is expected to make a volitional act of the will in coming to Christ, but they are told this isn't necessary because God has elected them already apart from their free-will, then they could end up never making such a decision. Thus, they will be excluded from the very hope which God is pleading for them to possess.

Life application: If you have never simply received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, calling on Him as Lord, then do so today. The choice is an eternity-deciding decision, and the choice is yours.

Heavenly Father, I am thankful that I live in a time when the word of God was spoken often enough to me that I finally realized I had to do something in order to be saved. I realized that the choice is mine and that I had to call on Jesus. I thank You first for the offer of pardon, and I thank You also that You gave me the sense through multiple callings to make the free-will decision to receive it. You certainly are a gracious and patient God! How I love You. Help me now to continue to speak to others about this wonderful offer of peace and reconciliation. Amen.

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.

2 Corinthians 6:2

In verse 1, Paul said that they (meaning the apostles) as "workers together *with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain." Now to show the importance of calling on Christ at the present moment, whatever that moment may be, he goes to Isaiah 49:8 to demonstrate that even the Old Testament showed there would be an acceptable time for both Jew and Gentile to reach out and be saved.

His quote is from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), but even the Hebrew version carries the idea that he is conveying -

"Thus says the LORD:

'In an acceptable time I have heard You,

And in the day of salvation I have helped You;" Isaiah 49:8

"For He says" then is speaking of the Lord, who is God. As Jesus is one and the same with the Lord of the Old Testament, it is again a note concerning the deity of Christ (as was explained in verse 1). It is He who says, "In an acceptable time I have heard you." There was to be found a time of special grace upon the world. That time came at the advent of Jesus Christ. He, born without original sin, lived under the law perfectly, and gave His life up in exchange for the sin of the world.

His resurrection proved that this was so. Fifty days later, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all who believed. This is that acceptable time. It is a period of grace where man's sins are not counted against them. As Paul continues, he writes, "And in the day of salvation I have helped you."

Where we cannot help ourselves, Christ stepped in to help us. We already bear Adam's sin and thus stand condemned before God. We cannot traverse time and undo what Adam has done and so we stand helpless to do anything about our miserable plight. But at the coming of Christ, and in the completion of His work, He has helped us. There is now a way of being reconciled to God. But there is something important attached to this that Paul informs us. He says, "Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation."

The urgency of his words shows us at least two things -

- 1) There must be an obligation upon us. If not, then there would be no need to worry about God or the apostles pleading for us to act.
- 2) There is a point when this "accepted time" will end.

Christ's offer is exactly that, an offer. It can be accepted, and it can be refused. Further, it is not forced upon anyone. No person is "regenerated in order to believe." Rather they are given an offer of peace and they must accept it. "The day of salvation" then is any day that we have. As we only have "today" (as Hebrews chapters 1-4 so minutely explains), then we need to understand that Today is in fact the day of salvation. There is a day when we will die, or at least become incapable of choosing Jesus. At that point, Today is over, and our fate is sealed. Paul's words in this verse are a sobering reminder to all that our days are numbered, but that this set number is unknown to us. The first chapter of Proverbs shares the same thought with us-

"Because I have called and you refused,
I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,
²⁵ Because you disdained all my counsel,
And would have none of my rebuke,
²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your terror comes,
²⁷ When your terror comes like a storm,
And your destruction comes like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon you.
²⁸ "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me." Proverbs 1:24-28

Life application: If you have heard His voice, don't rebel against it. Receive Jesus Christ and be reconciled to God. Truly there is no Tomorrow that we can count on. Call on Jesus Today.

Heavenly Father, I remember seeing what happened on Sept 11, 2001. I remember seeing people make a choice, "Will I stay where I am and burn to death, or will I jump..." Watching those people jump to their deaths reminds me that we don't know our last day. Not one of them thought, "I will go to work and die today." Surely You called to each one of them. Some may have chosen Christ; some may have refused Him - only You know. None of us know our end and so I would pray for any who have never called on Jesus. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day of Your favor. Turn their hearts to You Today. Amen.

We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.

2 Corinthians 6:3

The construction of this verse is in the participle form and thus it is a resumption of the thought from verse 6:1. Verse 6:2 then was a parenthetical insert. In verse 1, he had admonished his audience to not receive the grace of God in vain. After that came the parenthetical thought that implores acting on that grace today. And now, to bolster the thought that the apostles were pleading with God on our behalf (also from verse 1) he says, "We give no offense in anything."

It would be futile to "plead" with someone over a matter while at the same time offending them. In fact, it would be contradictory to do so. In order to have their pleas responded to favorably then, they ensured that no offense was coming from them. The word for "offense" is *proskopé* rather than the more common word *skandalon*. This is its

only use in the NT, and it comes from another verb which indicates dashing something to the ground. The idea then is that they have determined not to allow anyone to fall because of their actions.

And the reason for this is then explained, "...that our ministry may not be blamed." The purpose of their ministry was to bring people to a saving knowledge of the Lord and to properly train them in the ways of the Lord. If they were causing people to fall instead of being saved, their ministry would be blamed for its inappropriate handling of their responsibilities.

This word for "blamed" is *mómaomai*. It is used just twice in the NT, here and in 2 Corinthians 8:20. However, it comes from another similar word which is found in 2 Peter 2:10 when speaking of "those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority" (2 Peter 2:10).

The apostles' desire was to be above reproach in all ways so that they would be effective ministers of the word of salvation and so that their ministries would be a light for others to see and draw near to. How good it would be if all pastors and teachers of the Bible were so motivated!

Life application: Though we are not apostles, each of us who bears the title "Christian" is a representative of the One who bestows that title on us. Let us remember this as we conduct our lives in the presence of others. Their perception of Jesus may be limited to how we present ourselves.

Heavenly Father, I cannot thank You enough for the great salvation You accomplished in me. And yet, I feel as if I let You down so often. When people see me, they are supposed to see someone who represents Christ who saved me. I know for sure this isn't always the case. Help me to be a faithful minister of Your glory, giving no offense as I speak about the gospel. And help me to keep from bringing blame upon the glorious name of Jesus. Amen.

But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 2 Corinthians 6:4

The word "but" is based upon what he just said in the preceding verse. It was the aim of the apostles to give no offense in anything in order to keep the ministry from blame. Instead of allowing this to occur, he notes that in all ways they commended themselves "as ministers of God."

The word "commend" isn't meant in the sense of "a pat on the back" but rather "how to behave." Their actions and behavior were constantly being subordinated to the importance of their ministry. It was as if they had a subprogram running in the back of their mind, constantly reminding them of the solemnity of their work. Therefore, they were always ensuring their behavior was kept in line with the expectations Christ would have of their ministry.

After noting this, he now begins a lengthy list of such expectations beginning with "much patience." This is perfectly in line with what he said to the Corinthians in his first letter. In his great discourse on love in 1 Corinthians 13, he says that "love suffers long." This is something then that would be expected of an apostle. The demonstration of much patience, especially with those who were lost in sin, was necessary to bring them from their darkened state to the light of Christ.

He next says, "...in tribulations." This is the same word used in 2 Corinthians 4:17. It indicates a "narrow place that 'hems someone in'; *tribulation*, especially *internal pressure* that causes someone to feel confined (restricted, 'without options')." The apostles, particularly Paul, as is documented in Acts, faced such pressures as they ministered to others.

His next description of them is "in needs." It indicates "calls for *timely help*, i.e. *strong force needed* to accomplish something *compulsory (absolutely required)*. This kind of situation is typically brought on by great pain or distress." Again, the life of the apostle was frequented with such hardships.

Finally, this verse ends with "in distresses." As with the previous two words, HELPS Word Studies gives us a clue concerning what Paul is trying to relay. This word means "properly, a narrow place; (figuratively) a *difficult* circumstance – which God always authorized and hence only produces a *temporal sense of confinement*. Through Christ's inworking of faith, *internal* distress (sense of pressure, anguish) is ironically the way He shows His *limitless* work – in our 'limitations'!"

Such was the life of the apostle as they endeavored to keep their ministries free from scandal. It was their heart's goal and desire to glorify Christ and not bring any scandal upon His glorious name.

Life application: We live in a world of comfort and ease. But should that end for whatever reason, let us remember our testimony as bearers of the title "Christian" and endeavor to never bring discredit upon that glorious title.

Lord God, my heavenly Father - I bear a name and a title which has the highest honor of all. I bear the exalted name of Jesus and the title of Christian. Help me to always endeavor to remember my place and to never bring discredit upon either. Rather, grant me the grace to always bring glory to my Lord and to the faith which I possess in Him. This I pray to Your honor and glory. Amen.

...in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;
2 Corinthians 6:5

In this verse, Paul continues with his list of what the apostles were willing to endure in order "that our ministry may not be blamed." He begins with "stripes." These would have come from both Romans and from Jews and the method in which each conducted them was different. Either way, it was a most painful procedure which was intended to humiliate and degrade the offender as if they were really scandalous people. Paul notes later in this epistle (verse 11:23-25) that he was scourged five times by the Jews and that he was beaten with rods three times. In Acts 5:40, other apostles were beaten by the Sanhedrin. Certainly, other such "stripes" were to be found among the other apostles at other times as well.

Next is noted "imprisonments." Peter and other apostles are noted as having been imprisoned in Acts. Paul is also so noted on several occasions there. Similarly, Paul was later imprisoned at the end of Acts. He wrote some of his epistles from prison. Roman prisons were dirty and smelly. If it was cold, they were very cold. If it was hot, they were very hot. The prisoners were often bound in chains so that they could hardly move. Sanitation was completely lacking. And yet, the apostles are recorded as having endured this for the name of Christ.

The word for "tumults" is described by Vincent's Word Studies - "This is one of the words which show the influence of political changes. From the original meaning of unsettledness, it developed, through the complications in Greece and in the East after the death of Alexander, into the sense which it has in Luke - political instability. One of the Greek translators of the Old Testament uses it in the sense of dread or anxious care." From this word, we can assume that Paul is speaking of any time they spoke, and which was met with a great unsettling because of their words. The book of Acts is replete with such instances.

"In labors" is indicative of the constant work the apostles engaged in as they conducted their ministry. Paul was a tent maker and supported himself as he also labored in the sharing of the gospel. In order to feed themselves and live, it was not considered

shameful to also work hard in labors. This is something almost foreign to the idea of being a "pastor" today. Jets and expensive hotels often await many as they travel around sharing watered-down messages to people. However, there are also many faithful pastors out there who are willing to show up on Sunday to preach and also do what is necessary to keep the home well fed during the week.

The words "in sleeplessness" are obvious. The days were long, the nights were filled with instruction, traveling was difficult and even dangerous, whether by land or by sea. The apostles endured long hours as they moved throughout their regions of evangelism in order to share the wondrous news of salvation through the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Finally, today's list includes "fastings." There are probably two types of fasting referred to here. The first would be voluntary. The apostles would forego meals in order to continue sharing the gospel. They would fast in order to petition the Lord for His favor. They would fast so that they could travel without being heavy with food. For whatever reason, they would have voluntarily fasted. However, they would also have faced involuntary fasts. They would face a scarcity of food due to a lack of money, a lack of availability, or even because they were facing the "imprisonments" where they may have been denied proper food. For these and certainly other reasons, the apostles faced fastings which were hard on the body but good for the soul.

Life application: How easy we have had it in the modern world. But we must remember that there are, even to this day, faithful Christians who are in the mission field who are facing similar difficulties that the apostles faced. Let us pray for our missionaries and be thankful that there are such faithful people who are out doing great things in order to bring the message of Christ to a lost and dying world.

Heavenly Father, today I'd like to lift up the missionaries around the world who are faithfully spreading the message of Jesus to a lost and dying world. I know many of them are in most difficult places and are sharing a message which could even cost them their lives. And yet, they are willing to go forth in order to tell about Your giving of Jesus. Thank You for these people. Be an ever-present help and comfort to them as they serve You. Amen.

...by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 2 Corinthians 6:6

Paul's list of what the apostles held fast to for the sake of the gospel continues to grow in this verse. His next characteristic is "by purity." The idea he is certainly conveying is more than just a general concept of pure living which is free from sensual sin, but the purity of morals and of mind which are behind his actions. The apostles endeavored to be pure in all ways to the exclusion of even any impure thoughts. They had their thoughts, as it were, "fixed on Jesus."

Next, he includes "by knowledge." Scholars disagree on what Paul is referring to with the Greek word *gnosis*. Is he speaking of a knowledge of the law, of prudent living, or something else? Based on his constant emphasis on the gospel of Christ, the simplest explanation of what he is speaking about is referred to in Ephesians 3:4 where he notes "my knowledge in the mystery of Christ."

Although Paul was given specific knowledge of the gentile-led church that the other apostles apparently weren't given, they were all endowed with understanding the things which had been revealed. In 2 Peter 3:15, Peter speaks of Paul's wisdom on spiritual matters, and he elevates Paul's writings to the level of the rest of Scripture. Therefore, the "knowledge" he is referring to here for all of the apostles is certainly a gospel-based one.

His next category is "by longsuffering." In the previous verse he mentioned "patience." Now he brings in longsuffering. This isn't just patience in the sense of waiting for others to learn, but rather it is the patience of enduring external attacks and fierce trials which attempted to thwart their effectiveness. Instead, they endured through these things, looking forward to a greater reward.

From this he moves to "kindness." Despite the trials and external attacks, it was their goal to return kindness to those who persecuted them. This is in line with Jesus' admonition to "turn the other cheek." The apostles knew that argumentation and a defiant attitude would never change the hearts of their hearers.

"By the Holy Spirit" shows their grand reliance on God to conduct them and to lead the way for them. Instead of succumbing to the pressures and difficulties they faced, they relied on the strength of God which indwelt them. And with the fellowship of the Spirit, they were able to evince joy and contentment, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Finally in this verse, he mentions, "by sincere love." Of all the fruits of the Spirit, this is the one most highlighted in Paul's writings. Instead of loving through pretense, they

truly relied on the Spirit to fill them with the highest form of love. It is the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 and which allowed them to tend to those who otherwise would be rejected. But the love of God which filled the apostles was there because they had the example of Christ Jesus who went before them. He died for a world full of miserable wretches, and so He became that purest example for the apostles to emulate.

Life application: As the apostles lived, we too can live. If we simply rely on God and are in line with His word, we should be able to conduct ourselves in the same manner in which they did.

Lord Jesus, You came and lived among a rebellious race. You are so far above Your creatures that we cannot even compare to Your glory. And yet, You not only came to us in our rebellion, but You had compassion on us, You cared for us, You lived for us, and You died for us. What an example of the highest love of all. Now Lord, I ask that You fill me with the same love towards others. Help me to love the unlovable and to care for those who are down and out. Give me a servant's heart to be a blessing to all. Amen.

...by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, 2 Corinthians 6:7

In this portion of the on-going list, Paul gives specific gifts of the apostles which were a part of their ministry. The first is, "by the word of truth." This is a way of saying "that which imparts God's truth to men." In their presentation, there was no corruption of the gospel through human systems of philosophy or of works being added to what God had done. Rather, it contains that which is pure and undefiled concerning the plan of salvation and the right division of the word of God.

Next, he says, "by the power of God." The apostles were noted for having miraculous gifts which they exercised from time to time. These are recorded in Acts and a study of them shows that they were not always available, but it seems they knew exactly when they were and how to use them exactly as God intended. Further, "the power of God" is probably also speaking of the effect of the gospel on its hearers. People who had never heard of Jesus were converted by a simple explanation of who He is and what He came to do. If nothing else, that is a great example of the power of God working effectively in others!

In his next category, he changes the preposition from *en* (in or by) to *dia* (through or "by means of") - "by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." The endowments they exercised were done so by the means of righteousness. There was

nothing false in how they conducted themselves and what they did was for the glory of God, and it was in accord with His righteous nature.

The term "on the right and on the left" is intended to show that they were fully prepared for whatever came their way. Just as a Roman soldier was capable of fighting with weapons in either hand, and as they were normally armed with a weapon in one hand and a shield in the other, they were able to fight both offensively and defensively. Likewise, the apostles were so prepared for the spiritual battles they faced. The idea is given a more thorough description in Ephesians 6 where Paul goes on to describe the whole armor of God by which they (and which includes even us today) were prepared for meeting the challenges they faced.

Life application: The apostles were given certain gifts and abilities which no longer exist today, but they were also endowed with gifts and abilities which each of us can exercise. With training and constant use, we can hone our abilities to become effective soldiers in the spiritual battlefield which rages all around us. Read Ephesians 6 today and think on how you can better prepare yourself for the challenges we as Christians are asked to face.

Heavenly Father, You have not left us on a battlefield without the implements to wage the war we face. Instead, You have given us a list of those things we need and which we should always have ready. Help us to be prepared for the spiritual conflict which wars against the souls of men and be with us as we engage in the battle. The devil and his demons are skilled warriors, but with those things You have provided us, and with Your presence among us, we will surely prevail! Thank You for being our Leader in this great conflict. Amen.

...by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true;
2 Corinthians 6:8

This again continues with the list of how the apostles were perceived by those around them and how they responded to those perceptions. They pressed forward though in order that they would "give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed (v.3)."

The first item in this verse is "by honor and by dishonor." This is referring to how he and the other apostles were perceived, not by how they actually conducted themselves. In John 7:12, this same type of thought is given about Jesus. There it says, "And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, 'He is good'; others

said, 'No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.'" It is certain that Jesus conducted Himself and His ministry with honor, but some chose to look at it in a contrary manner, speaking ill against Him. This is the same thing that the apostles faced. But they persevered in an honorable way in their efforts regardless of how they were spoken of.

Paul next says, "...by evil report and good report." This is similar to the previous item in the list. Paul was constantly maligned (as certainly were all of the apostles) as evil doers. Reports were sent against them; some good and some bad. An example of a good report is found in the decree of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:22-29. An example of a bad report is found in Acts 17:5-9 where Paul and his associates were accused of having "turned the world upside down."

Finally in the list of this verse, he notes that they are regarded "as deceivers, and yet true." Again, this is similar to the first two thoughts in that accusations of false teaching and heresy were leveled against the apostles. The Jews saw the Christians as a false, breakaway sect. In their mission travels, they were accused of introducing an illegal form of religion under Roman law. They were accused of making stuff up out of their heads and even being insane.

And yet, the message that they carried was and is the only true path to salvation. Without it, there is no hope for fallen man. But with it, there is reconciliation between God and man and the hope of an eternity of joy in His presence. The apostles carried this message faithfully and stood on it, even to death itself.

Life application: Concerning salvation, there is one truth of God and only one. It is found in the pages of the Holy Bible, and it reveals the message of Jesus Christ. It has become more and more unpopular to the people of the world to hear that this is so. Because of this, faithful Christians can expect to be maligned, dishonored, and even accused of deception. These accusations may bring real trouble for Christians in the near future, but we are to be prepared for such a time and to be ready to make a defense for the hope which we profess. Be ready! Stand firm! Proclaim that Christ is Lord!

Heavenly Father, Jesus was maligned by those around Him as deceiving the people. Also, the apostles were accused of the same thing. They were dishonored and maligned by those they came to help. The message they carried was the truth and yet they were accused of being deceivers. And now this is happening in the country in which I live. But why should I care if I am simply telling the truth? They can have my body; You have my soul. No fear here. I proclaim Jesus Christ is Lord and the only way to be reconciled to You. Amen.

...as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; 2 Corinthians 6:9

Paul's list of the things the apostles went through for the sake of the gospel is expanded to include "as unknown, and yet well known." The apostles were ignored as if they were nobodies. People looked over them as if they were just one of many faces in a crowd, or someone passing by on the street without a nod of the head to say hello. Dignitaries looked down on them and others thought they were troublemakers.

And yet, they were fully known to God. They were selected by Him for His special work of beginning a (so far) 2000-year proclamation by the church of the message of Christ. They were well known by those who had received their words of peace with God, and they were treated with respect by them for the important work they were doing. Even if the world at large cared nothing for them, those who truly mattered knew them well.

Next, he says "...as dying, and behold we live." In 2 Corinthians 1:9, Paul noted that "we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead." He also noted in his first epistle to them that he "died daily" for the sake of Christ. But despite these types of things, they lived on. He uses the word "behold" for emphasis here. It is as if their dying itself died each day, turning into life by the power of God who sustained them. There is in this a hint of the great victory of Christ over death which allowed them to face death, knowing that it had no true hold over them.

Finally in this verse are the words "...as chastened, and yet not killed." This is probably not speaking of the chastenings of man (such as scourges and whips), but rather that of God. Paul notes in 2 Corinthians 12:7 that "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."

God allowed this chastening influence in his life to keep him humble and dependent on the grace of Christ in all things. Such a chastening may have been severe, but it was not enough to take his life. Instead it was there to lead others to life! Such is the manifold wisdom of God. What we often think of as evil may actually have a good purpose in God's plans.

Life application: Reading and thinking on the story of Joseph will provide a real-life recorded example of what Paul is speaking of in this verse. Take time to read his account, from Genesis 37-50 and compare it to the words of Paul here. You will see

exactly what Paul is speaking of. And while doing so, think on the same type of situations you have faced. In doing so, you can be more reassured that your own trials are not unknown to God. Instead, they are fully known and have been, and are being, used for His good purposes.

Heavenly Father, as difficult as many of the trials we face are not one is unknown to You. What we often perceive of as "evil" is actually being used as a part of Your greater plan. Grant us the wisdom to see that nothing happens apart from Your sovereign will and that You have it all under control. Help us to see the darkened valleys for what they truly are. And we will give You thanks and glory for them from the shining mountain tops! Hallelujah and Amen.

...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. 2 Corinthians 6:10

Paul completes his lengthy list of things the apostles endured for the sake of the gospel with this verse. He begins with the words, "...as sorrowful." The life of the apostle was one which, by its very nature, included an element of sorrow. They evangelized the lost, many of whom never received the message they proclaimed. For Paul, he carried an especially great sorrow for the lost within his own people, Israel. Concerning their state, he wrote this in Romans 9 -

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart."

-Romans 9:1, 2

Along with sorrow for the lost, they certainly felt sorrow during their afflictions, trials, and imprisonments. The life of an apostle was one of all of these as they were continuously under attack for what they proclaimed. And yet, at the same time they were "always rejoicing." They possessed something that could never steal their joy; the sure knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ. Salvation had come to the world!

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:16, "Rejoice always." He was the perfect example of this. Despite his sorrows in his earthly afflictions, there was a deeper and more perfect joy which those afflictions could never steal away. The 69th Psalm very closely reflects the sentiments which Paul writes about here. In it, David writes of the numerous trials and afflictions which he faced. And yet, in the midst of it he writes of sorrow mixed with joy -

"But I *am* poor and sorrowful;
Let Your salvation, O God, set me up on high.
³⁰ I will praise the name of God with a song,
And will magnify Him with thanksgiving." Psalm 69:29, 30

Next Paul writes that they were "as poor, yet making many rich." The word "poor" describes paupers. They were literally destitute of any earthly wealth. Paul worked with his own hands to feed himself. The rich and luxurious life he once knew ended when he called on Christ. He once sat with the ruling council of Jerusalem, but later he often sat in dirty Roman prisons. He gave all for the cause of Christ as he testifies to in Philippians 3:8 -

"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ."

And yet, in their poverty, the apostles made "many rich." Jesus asked in Matthew 16:26, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" In other words, all the wealth of the world is mere poverty without salvation. But through Christ, eternal riches await those who will but receive Him. This was what the apostles offered to a sick and dying world. Through their message many have become kings! It is a message which still has the same ability today, and so even though dead, their words are still bringing this eternal wealth to people everywhere.

Finally, Paul closes this thought with "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Charles Ellicott explains these words this way -

"The series of paradoxes culminates in this. In language which has found echoes in the thoughts of sages, saints, mystics, he utters the truth that in the absolute surrender of the thought of calling anything its own the soul becomes the heir of the universe. All things are his, as with the certainty of an assured inheritance. The beatitude of the meek, of those who claim nothing, is that they "shall inherit the earth," and so all things are theirs—the forces of nature, and the changes and chances of life—for all are working together for their good."

Even with the loss of all of their earthly riches, they had gained the greater, eternal riches of heaven. The verb used in this verse means "possessing all things to the fullest." Paul confirms this thought in 1 Corinthians 3 -

"Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. ²³ And you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is* God's."

-1 Corinthians 3:21-23

Life application: Should Christians find themselves robbed of everything they possess, they still possess everything. Let us not worry about the temporary, corruptible, earthly things we have. Rather, let us rejoice in our eternal inheritance which Peter writes about for us to revel in -

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

-1 Peter 1:3-5

Glorious God, help me to not get stuck on the things of this world. No matter what I possess, it is temporary and will perish. Help me to fix my eyes on that which is eternal, incorruptible, and undefiled. Grant me the sense to focus on that which will never fade away - my inheritance in heaven - because of the work of Christ Jesus my Lord. Thank You for the sure promise I enjoy in Him. I possess all things to the fullest in Him alone! Amen.

O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open.

2 Corinthians 6:11

In what is the most personal appeal in his letters, Paul directly and openly calls out to the Corinthians. In only two other letters does he directly name his recipients - Galatians 3:1 and Philippians 4:15. But this address to the Corinthians is most personal in nature. The term "we have spoke openly to you" is literally "our mouth is opened to you." It is a way of saying that a free and full use of language has been imparted to them, holding nothing back.

It is his way of saying that everything said thus far has been candid and unreserved, culminating in the words of the previous verses which showed everything that the apostles had gone through for the sake of their hearers, which included those in Corinth. From there he said, "our heart is wide open." More literally, "our heart has been expanded." The Pulpit Commentary helps to explain this -

"After writing the foregoing majestic appeal, he felt that he had disburdened his heart, and as it were made room in it to receive the Corinthians unreservedly, in spite of all the wrongs which some of them had done him."

The use of the words "mouth" and "heart" in the same thought is not unique to this verse. It is also used by Jesus in Matthew 12 in a negative sense -

"Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Matthew 12:34

Also, Paul uses it concerning the process of salvation in Romans 10 -

"...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:9, 10

Life application: Sometimes it is good to clear out our thoughts to others before we can tell them how much they mean to us. Paul tenderly corrected his listeners on points of contention, but he then moved on to his words of love and tender affection for them. If we follow this pattern, we can get such difficulties behind us and move on with the freedom of hearts which are no longer burdened.

Heavenly Father, personal conflict is one of the things I really dislike dealing with. And yet, unless I do, my heart remains burdened with the thing that has affected my relationship. Fear of losing a friend then is mixed with the stress of carrying the offense around. Help me to deal with times like this in a way which will keep me from losing the important person in my life and yet freeing me from the heavy weight my heart feels. Be with me in such times for a happy resolution to the trial. Amen.

You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections.

2 Corinthians 6:12

Paul just exclaimed in the preceding verse that the hearts of the apostles were wide open to those in Corinth. In contrast to this, he says, "You are not restricted by us." The sense of this is that though their hearts were wide, allowing room enough for loving the entire congregation, there was a restricting of the hearts of the Corinthians which wasn't allowing for the same affections towards them.

Instead, he says, "...but you are restricted by your *own* affections." In this, he means that they were the cause of their own closing of heart towards the apostles. It had nothing to do with the apostles at all but was a chronic problem with their own congregation. Through their own errors and misapplications of what Paul and the others had instructed them, they had gotten off the proper path of doctrine. This caused a conflict to arise between the two parties and had thus caused them to withhold their affections from being as broad as they should be.

For the word "affections," Paul uses the Greek word *splagchnon*. In years past, some older translations, such as the KJV, use the unfortunate word "bowels" to translate it. This is a regrettable and actually meaningless way of translating the Greek. Albert Barnes explains the proper rendering of this word -

"The word used here (σπλάγχνα *splangchna*) commonly means in the Bible the tender affections. The Greek word properly denotes the upper viscera; the heart, the lungs, the liver. It is applied by Greek writers to denote those parts of victims which were eaten during or after the sacrifice - Robinson (Lexicon). Hence, it is applied to the heart, as the seat of the emotions and passions; and especially the gentler emotions, the tender affections, compassion, pity, love, etc. Our word "bowels" is applied usually to the lower viscera, and by no means expresses the idea of the word which is used in Greek."

It is always good to remember that being captivated by one translation will inevitably lead to bondage of thought. It is far better to put away nonsense teachings that one version is the only one which should be used and to study with diligence what the true intent of the original languages is.

Life application: Often, our hearts will become hard to other Christians because of our own faulty doctrine. When this occurs, it is always wise to evaluate ourselves and what we believe, knowing that we could be in the wrong. Paul shows the Corinthians this so that they will lovingly reach out in order to be corrected and returned to a state of true fellowship with others.

Lord God, there are many, many divisions within the church which have been caused by sloppy doctrine or by the bondage of sticking to one translation of the Bible which is faulted in its translation. How can we overcome these things? I know that it is by studying to show ourselves approved and correcting our misperceptions of what You are telling us. Help me to always search for the truth in Your word and apply it to proper doctrine so that I can break down the walls of division and divisiveness. Amen.

Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.

2 Corinthians 6:13

In the previous two verses, Paul has noted that the apostles had opened their hearts wide to the Corinthians and that they had not withheld their affections for them. On the other hand, the Corinthians had withheld theirs. Now Paul notes what would be good "in return for the same." Some translations say, "for a recompense," but this leans toward implying a repayment. Rather than a repayment, Paul is simply asking for a like-return. The NIV does a good job with the thought using the words, "a fair exchange." As if in a fair exchange, he says to them "you also be open."

This is no different than any other social grace which is given out. If someone says to their neighbor "Hi Tom," all he would expect in return is a "Hi Paul!" And with each different level of openness between friends, one would expect there to be an exchange in kind for a kindness shown. And in the case of Paul and the believers in Corinth, there is an added reason for this which is implied in the words, "I speak as to children." Paul was, as it were, a spiritual father to the congregation. In such a relationship, one would expect the children to give their parents the same kindness that the parents had given to them. If not, then the relationship would be unbalanced and would easily become an unsatisfying one.

Paul uses the same father/child metaphor with them in 1 Corinthians 4:14 and he also conveys it to those in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 2:11. He considered the churches he established as his family and those in them as his own dear children. To the Galatians, he speaks in a very similar manner concerning the idea of becoming like him -

"Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I *became* like you." Galatians 4:12

Paul was a man of passion for those he shared the gospel with. He cherished them and he desired them to reciprocate with the same feelings of affection.

Life application: One-sided relationships will eventually wear out the one who is always on the giving side. Unfortunately, the giver is often unwilling to ask for a fair exchange of affection in fear of losing the relationship. But Paul shows us that it is right and proper to speak one's heart in times like this in order to find a happy balance in such matters.

Heavenly Father, help me to be a giving person who is willing to expend myself for the sake of others. And yet, help me not to be duped by those who would take advantage of

my attempts to be kind and sharing. It's often hard to know how far to go with a relationship without giving unnecessary offense. So, I would pray for the wisdom to know what is right and appropriate as stressful times come up between me and others. Grant me this wisdom so that You will always be glorified through how I conduct myself. Amen.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:14

After speaking to the Corinthians about opening wide their hearts, Paul now seems to take on a completely different line of thought which some scholars find out of place, as if something was later taken out or added. But there is no reason to assume this. His last words prior to this verse said, "Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open."

With that thought in mind, he simply shows them how to be open. He has gone from petition to instruction. The words of instruction are to "not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." The word for "unequally yoked together" is *heterozygēō*. It is a word only found here and nowhere else in ancient Greek. It was probably made up by Paul for this very verse.

HELPS Word Studies provides the following concerning this word -

heterozygēō - (from /*héteros*, "another of a *different* kind" and /*zygós*, "a yoke, joining two to a single plow") – properly, *different kinds* of people *joined* together *but unevenly matched*; hence "unequally yoked" (not aptly joined). ... *heterozygēō* ("mis-matched") is used figuratively of Christians *wrongly committed* to a partner holding *very different values (priorities)*, i.e. that run contrary to faith (the *kingdom of God*).

Adding to this, Vincent's Word Studies shows that the word "unequally" needs to be properly defined - "Unequally gives an ambiguous sense. It is not inequality, but difference in kind, as is shown by the succeeding words."

Paul's mind was certainly on Old Testament passages which contain this very idea. One from Leviticus and one from Deuteronomy give us a better sense of what he was thinking about –

"You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you." Leviticus 19:19

"You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together." Deuteronomy 22:10

In the first example, it shows the need to keep from corruption of individual kinds. In the second, it shows that different kinds have different strengths and are thus designed for different purposes. To join a donkey with an ox would wear out the donkey or frustrate the ox, or both.

Thinking on a human level, we can make logical comparisons to both OT references. And so, to direct our thoughts in what he means, he will next ask five questions which will provide insights into the precept. The first three will contain the argument he is making and the last two will support the conclusion.

Before entering into the questions, it should be noted that the word for "fellowship" is also found only here in the NT. It is *metoché*, and it means "sharing, partnership, fellowship." It represents "a close relation between partners, i.e., people sharing something held in common; joint-activity."

Paul is saying that an unequal yoking arises because of different goals and priorities based on one's world view. A Christian will have one world view and a non-Christian will have another. Therefore, for a Christian to marry, start a business partnership, or otherwise closely associate with a non-Christian in an important way can only be considered an unequal yoking. Later Paul gives the opposite of such yoking in Philippians 4:3 -

"And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names *are* in the Book of Life."

In support of his argument, Paul next asks the first two of his five questions. He begins with, "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?" The obvious answer is "none." Believers are justified by faith and have been imputed the righteousness of Christ. The sin of unbelievers remains, and they stand in a state of unrighteousness before God. There can be no true fellowship in such a state.

His next question is, "And what communion has light with darkness?" This is a theme which permeates Scripture - light and darkness. The two are completely incompatible; where there is one, the other cannot exist. As Christians are "light" and the unbelieving world is "darkness," there can be no true fellowship between the two. A union of the two only causes confusion and breakdown of the intrinsic nature of one or the other.

Life application: When making important life decisions, we must always consider our position in Christ first. If it is difficult for marriages to survive even when both are agreed on their devotion to the Lord, how much more difficult will a marriage be when only one is wholly devoted to Him? The same is true with business partnerships and any other major aspect of our life where we must entrust our lives to an important goal. Let us first and foremost consider ourselves from a Christian perspective and make our alliances based on that.

Lord God, You have asked Your people to not be unequally yoked with non-believers. How often do we fail to heed this advice! And how difficult it is for us when we do! Help us to make right decisions about our lifetime choices which will be based on our allegiance to Jesus first. Help us to be obedient to Your word and to set our eyes, goals, hearts, and affections on Jesus as we live out these lives You have granted us. Amen.

And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 2 Corinthians 6:15

In this verse, Paul will continue with his five rhetorical questions which are based on the statement, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." The first question here contains the argument he is making by asking, "And what accord has Christ with Belial?" The second will support the conclusion by asking, "Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?"

In the first, he uses the term "Belial" and asks what accord Christ has with Belial. The answer is obviously, "None." There can be no true accord when one in Christ is yoked to one in Belial. The word for "accord" is *sumphónésis*. It is a word unique to the New Testament and by simply speaking it one can determine that it implies "harmony." It is the noun form of a verb which is found six times in the New Testament, and it is the root of where our word "symphony" comes from. There can be no harmony between the two. Rather, there can only be discord.

This proper name, Belial (in Greek, Beliar), is not found anywhere else in Scripture. However, Belial is used in the Old Testament as a combination of two words which

together mean "without profit" and thus "worthless." There are several possible reasons for the name being given as Beliar. The first is that the change from an l to an r is based on the Syriac pronunciation of the word where the "l" sounded more like an "r." Another reason is that the word is derived from Belyar, Lord of the forest. It would then be a synonym for Satan.

The second option seems more likely because the premise of the Bible is that we are either "in Christ" or we belong to the devil. There is no other position that we can be in as human beings. Either way, there can be no harmony between Christ and such a foe.

Paul's second question is, "Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" The answer is that one has no part with the other. The word "part" indicates the division of a country or an estate. But what belongs to Christ will not be apportioned out to those who don't believe in Him. The unregenerate have their part in this world and then eternal doom. Those who have called on Christ have a heavenly inheritance. Therefore, the two have no part with one another.

Life application: Paul's questions continue to put the spotlight on our associations. He is asking us to consider our position in Christ and then to evaluate those associations based on that state. If we are to become yoked to someone who has a different set of priorities and allegiances, then there can be no true harmony with them. They will be working towards one goal while we should be working towards another.

Gracious God, You sent Christ the Lord to purchase Your redeemed back from the power of the devil. Why would we want to align ourselves again with others who have not yet called on Christ and who still serve that wicked god of this world? Help Your people to make wise choices concerning their associations and to not become unequally yoked to non-believers in matters of great importance. Instead, help us to keep our allegiance to Christ pure and undefiled. Amen.

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? 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." 2 Corinthians 6:16

Paul asks his fifth rhetorical question here with the words, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols." The word for "agreement" is *sugkatathesis*, and is only

used here in the New Testament. It has a kindred verb which is found in Luke 23:51 and it literally means "...a putting down or depositing along with one. Hence of voting the same way with another, and so agreeing" (Vincent's Word Studies).

Throughout the chapter, Paul has demonstrated a mastery over the Greek language with his use of special words to convey his thoughts clearly, accurately, and unambiguously. In this, his question is basically asking, "Why would you throw your lot in with idols?" In chapter 8, he will speak of conscience and how our actions towards idols, and things offered to idols, are to be handled. Now in order to avoid any misperceptions or abuses of what he said, he shows them the folly of being joined to idols. And the reason is explicitly stated, "For you are the temple of the living God."

We are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Because of this, it would be contrary to unite with idols. It would show a divided loyalty and Jesus Himself said that a man can only serve one master. Even the Old Testament shows us this clearly. Time and again, the true God is set in contrast to the false gods of the surrounding people. A classic example of this is found in 1 Kings 18 -

"And Elijah came to all the people, and said, 'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD *is* God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.'"

-1 Kings 18:21

This is not the first time Paul has told them that they are the temple of God. In his first letter to them, he mentioned it also -

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?" 1 Corinthians 3:16

He repeated the thought in 1 Corinthians 6:19 as well. It is certain that he wanted them to know this and not forget it. Therefore, in his letters to those in Corinth, and throughout his other writings, he warns against mixing with the powers of darkness, with worldly things, etc.

And in order to show that this was something that had been prophesied about before the coming of Christ, he returns to the Old Testament. The words he selects show that his analogy of us being the temple of God was anticipated long before and that it would apply not only to Jews, but to Gentile believers as well.

His words are a composite of various verses from the Old Testament and convey the idea without being exact quotes. Three of the passages that were surely on his mind were Exodus 29:45, Leviticus 26:12, and Ezekiel 37:27. These are speaking to Israel about the Jewish nation. However, the book of Hosea shows that Gentiles being "My people" also applies. He deals with that concept more fully in Romans 9, citing Hosea at that time.

Life application: Because of Jesus, God has come to live within the people of the world. His Holy Spirit indwells us and has sealed us for the day of redemption. As this is true, why would we again join ourselves to forms of wickedness which are prohibited in Scripture? Paul's five questions beg us to think on who we are as the redeemed of the Lord and to act in a manner appropriate to that state.

O God, there was a time when I walked in this world without You. I was lost and separate from You. But then I heard the message of peace and reconciliation which told me that Jesus had come to die for me that I might live for You. In receiving Him, I received You - a new birth and a new hope. Now please help me to live for You, honoring that great Name above all names - Jesus! Help me to live out my days in holiness and righteousness, putting away the ways of the world. Amen.

Therefore

"Come out from among them

And be separate, says the Lord.

Do not touch what is unclean,

And I will receive you." 2 Corinthians 6:17

Again, in this verse, Paul uses a composite quoting of Scripture. Much of the quote is from Isaiah 52:11, 12, but it also draws on Leviticus 11:8, and the ending "I will receive you" resembles the Greek version of Ezekiel 11:17 and Jeremiah 24:5.

He begins with "therefore" to show a sequence of thoughts. In essence, the words of verses 14-18 will lead naturally to the result found in this verse. If we "come out from among them," meaning the associations warned against in those verses; if we are separate from such things; and if we refrain from touching that which is unclean - if we do these things - then the Lord says, "I will receive you."

It is through coming near to Christ, trusting in Him, and receiving His forgiveness that we draw near to God. In doing this, we naturally have separated ourselves from the ways of the world and thus God draws near to us. God is holy and we are to draw near to Him in

holiness. This is done through faith in Christ. If we fail to make this step, then God will not draw near to us, and we will remain un-adopted and forever separated from Him.

Life application: Sometimes after calling on Christ, we fall back into our old ways. When this happens, we may feel we have fallen out of favor with God. However, once we are "in" Christ we can never be separated from the love of God again. We have become children by adoption. Let us endeavor to live our lives in holiness, but when we stumble and fall, let us pick ourselves up and press on in His loving salvation.

Lord God, when I heard the good news of Jesus, I was overjoyed with receiving Him and knowing that I had been saved! However, since that day I have fallen short so many times. I haven't lived for Him as I should, I've done so many things that have proven me to be a faithless child, and I have certainly disappointed You. But I know that none of this has separated me from You. Through Christ, I am once and forever saved. Thank You for this wonderful reassurance. I love You my God! Amen.

**"I will be a Father to you,
And you shall be My sons and daughters,
Says the LORD Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:18**

Paul closes out this chapter with one more set of thoughts which is derived from several verses of the Old Testament. These include 2 Samuel 7:14; Isaiah 43:6; and Jeremiah 31:9. The term "Lord Almighty" would be from the Greek version of 2 Samuel 7:8.

This word, "Lord Almighty" is *pantokrator*. Paul uses it here and then it is only used again in Revelation by John. There he uses it nine times. It is a title which means "ruler of all, ruler of the universe, the almighty."

Paul's words touch at the heart of what Jesus came to do for fallen man. Through Christ, we are adopted. Our Creator becomes our Father through His work. And to ensure that this term "Father" isn't misunderstood as merely a title without the true meaning of the bonds of family, he restates the thought from the opposite angle by saying, "And you shall be My sons and daughters."

This verse brings us to the complete assurance that our adoption has taken place because of Christ, and it is one which bears the full honor of having been accepted into a personal, family relationship by the Ruler of the universe. He has become our adopted Father. If nothing else should stir our souls to gratitude for what Christ did, this certainly

should do it! How marvelous is God's plan of salvation that we should be called sons and daughters of God!

Life application: The bonds of family hold us to the Creator. Be assured that if you have been saved by the blood of Christ, that you will continue to be saved by the blood of Christ. Nothing in all of heaven or earth can separate you from the love of God which is found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Lord, Your word says that because of what You have done for me, I am now a child of God. I have been adopted into a family with the strongest bond in the universe. I know that nothing can ever separate me from my heavenly Father again because of what You have done. How can such love be? How immense is the heart of God that He would allow me to once again stand in His presence! Thank You Lord Jesus for this honor which came at such a high cost. Thank You for Calvary and the shedding of the blood of the Lamb! Amen.

CHAPTER 7

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 7:1

"Therefore" is given at the beginning of this chapter, asking us to reflect on what has thus far been presented in verses 6:16-18. The promises that Paul cites there are for those who are willing to set aside that which is unclean in order to be acceptable to the Lord and to be considered a true child of God, in right standing with Him. Go back and read those three verses in order to reflect on this "therefore."

And so, "having these promises" which have been presented, Paul calls the recipients of his letter "beloved." It is a term of endearment, probably used to temper the note of stern warning in his words. It is what a father may say when speaking to his disobedient son. By adding in a term of endearment, it will help calm any tension between the two. After that, more guidelines can then be given, just as Paul does here.

He says, "...let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." All of us need to constantly work towards purifying ourselves as we walk in this sin-stained world. Jesus gave us an example of this on the night before His crucifixion. During that encounter He said -

"He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean."

-John 10:13

By using two different words in the Greek for "bathed" and "wash," He was telling us that salvation is a done deal. We are purified unto salvation once and for all. However, we need to continually strive to wash away the impurities which come into our lives as we carry on in this earthly existence. It is the same thought which John later writes out in his first epistle -

"And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

-1 John 3:3

We are saved once and for all time, but we are to constantly be purifying ourselves as we continue in our saved state. The end-goal of this process is declared by Paul. It is to be "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The word for "perfecting" indicates bringing something to an end or to finish something. We are to constantly strive to bring in holiness until it is all that is left. And this is to be done "in the fear of God."

Just as a child shows a respectful fear to his father who is trying to steer him in the right direction, we are to show a much greater, reverential fear toward our heavenly Father. We are to strive to be like Him and not flaunt our sin in His face. Rather, we are to abhor it and work to put it behind us once and forever. In Romans 12:9 we are admonished to "abhor what is evil and to cling to what is good."

The race is set before us and we should strive to do our best in it, just as Paul is recorded as doing in Philippians 3 -

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

-Philippians 3:12-14

Life application: God has saved us to join Him in the eternal ages ahead. In doing so, He asks us to turn from our sin and to purify ourselves from all unrighteousness. What a terrifying corruption we have in our hearts that would keep us from accomplishing this to the very best of our abilities. Pray for strength and wisdom to be obedient to His call.

Heavenly Father, I can see how desperately wicked my heart is by the things I do which are certainly displeasing to You. You have saved me and set me in Your heavenly realm for all eternity, but while I am waiting for that day, I am living in a fallen and corrupt world. As I walk through it, I get tempted to follow such terrible desires and thoughts. Give me the ability to put these things behind me and to live for You, purifying myself from all unrighteousness. Amen.

Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one. 2 Corinthians 7:2

Paul now makes a most emotional appeal to his beloved brethren at Corinth. He begins with the words translated here as "Open *your hearts* to us." The words "your hearts" are inserted by the translators. The word "open" means "to make room." And so, the thought is "Make room for us (in your hearts)." They had once made sufficient room for Paul and the other apostles, but through infighting, divisions, etc. they had closed them off. Paul is begging for this to be undone.

Following this appeal, he justifies his request by stating three thoughts in rapid succession. In the Greek, each begins with the term "no man." Thus "no man" is in the emphatic position. In essence, "No one we have wronged, no one we have corrupted, no one we have cheated." By stating it this way, he is intentionally showing that no individual can lay a charge against them, much less the whole. They have acted in a blameless manner toward all people and each person.

His first of the three thoughts are "we have wronged no one." This may be a refutation of any charges of greed which had been levied against him or any of the other apostles, as if having swindled them in some way. They also proclaimed only the truth of the gospel without adding in anything which would defile it. Each person was treated in the same caring way, and no individual could come forward and state that they had been individually mistreated by them.

Secondly, he says that "we have corrupted no one." This word carries the sense of defilement. There was nothing impure in how they acted towards any person. There were no sexual advances made, and there was only that which could be regarded as pure and undefiled in their attitude and treatment of each and every person they encountered.

Finally, he says that "we have cheated no one." The word used here for "cheated" is used only by Paul, in 2 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians. It adds in the concept of seeking gain or exploiting another which isn't specifically implied in the other two verbs. There was no hint of acting in a deceptive manner in order to obtain personal gain.

In these three examples, Paul has wisely placed "no one" in the emphatic position to show that no individual could come forward and say that. "I may not have been cheated, but I'm sure he cheated someone else." If that were true, then "someone else" would have the ability to come forward at the reading of the letter to show that he had been wronged. In writing to all, he has also addressed each individual personally.

Life application: How good it would be if we could all make the same claim that Paul has made. This is especially true with our spiritual leaders. Instead of defrauding the flock, pastors and other spiritual leaders should be building them up and tending to them with gentle care.

Heavenly Father, I pray for wisdom in how I handle my interpersonal relationships with others. Give me the ability and the heart to never cheat, wrong, or corrupt another for the sake of personal gain. Instead, give me wisdom in how to build up and tend to their

needs, putting them ahead of myself in all matters, but especially the spiritual matters that they may need help with. Keep me from any impure or wicked attitude as I serve them in Your name. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 7:3

Paul just said to the Corinthians, "Open *your hearts* to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one." Having said this, he must have suddenly thought, "They may misperceive these words as a note of condemnation, assuming that I meant that I am responding to specific accusations against us."

To ensure they take his words in a general rather than a specific manner, he says, "I do not say *this* to condemn." Some translations (like the KJV) insert "you" at the end of this thought (I do not say *this* to condemn *you*), thus making it sound specific. However, "you" is not in the original, nor does it seem to be the intent. Instead, he is leaving his words vague in order to avoid specificity, and so they are to be taken in a general sense only.

Continuing on, he says, "...for I have said before that you are in our hearts." He could be referring to his first epistle, or even to his words spoken directly to them while he was with them. However, he gives a general sense of this thought twice so far in this letter -

"You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men..."

-2 Corinthians 3:2

"O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. ¹² You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your *own* affections. ¹³ Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open."

-2 Corinthians 6:11-13

He also conveyed this same thought to those at Philippi -

"...just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace." Philippians 1:7

Paul carried his flock with him wherever he went, and he treasured them in his heart like a father who loves his own son, so much so that his love for them extended to the

thought that they were "to die together and to live together." Paul was willing, if necessary, to give up all for his beloved brothers. If it meant spending the rest of his life with them and eventually dying with them, he would even do that in order to establish them in Christ.

Certainly, he felt that his letters and occasional visits would suffice, but he was willing to go to whatever extreme in order to prove his love to those he had evangelized. He writes a similar note of affection to the congregation at Thessalonica -

"So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us." 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Life application: To what extent are you willing to go to ensure that Christ is properly proclaimed? Missionaries need to be funded. If good ones lose their means of support, it may mean that only doctrinally unsound missionaries remain. Has the Lord possibly called you to give something up in order to ensure that a Bible study need is met? Is there a task which needs to be accomplished on Sunday morning left undone because you are unwilling to help out? Continuously evaluate the circumstances around you and be aware of the things that are lacking and which you could help with to be met. You are serving the Lord, so serve the Lord!

Heavenly Father, help me to search myself out and determine if I am using my full potential to help with the ministries I am connected to. Have I helped out the missionaries that our church is connected to enough? Have I overlooked something at the Bible study or church gathering that could be of benefit to those meetings? Help me not to be stingy in the time or talents I have been given, but instead help me to use them wisely for Your glory. Amen.

Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation. 2 Corinthians 7:4

It should be noted that thus far Paul has been speaking in plural terms, "we this, and we that." However, he now changes to the first person singular for the first time. In his words, which pertain specifically to himself, he begins with "Great is my boldness of speech toward you." This isn't an apology for the boldness of his words; instead, it is with confidence that he is using his words appropriately and in a sound manner. It is the same type of thought that is conveyed in 1 Timothy 3 -

"For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 3:13

After this, he again uses the first person singular and states, "...great is my boasting on your behalf." Paul had already boasted of the Corinthians in his letters, and he certainly boasted of them in his words to others as well. He was confident that they were on a sound path, even if doctrinal correction was necessary. He was sure that his admonishments would be taken in their proper light and be acted upon accordingly. Thus, he knew he could continue to greatly boast in them.

Next he says, "I am filled with comfort." Paul was consoled in the fact that they were ready and willing to listen to him. He didn't fear that they would reject his words, but rather respond to them favorably. In verses 5-7, he will continue to explain this particular thought to them.

Finally, he finishes this verse with, "I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation." It seems like a paradox to say such a thing! The Greek word "exceedingly" is *hyperperisseuó*. It is found only here and in Romans 5:20. It is a superlative way of saying that his joy is abounding to the highest measure. The words of this clause then are given based on the two preceding clauses.

To be exceedingly joyful in affliction is something unique to the Christian experience. Others may claim they have it, but it cannot compare to that which the Christian possesses. There is a hope which transcends the earthly afflictions we face, and which are grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have the same guarantee and thus we can rejoice even in such times of trial. He gives a note of such joy during affliction in Philippians 2 -

"Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me." Philippians 2:17, 18

Life application: If we are truly sure of our salvation, then why should we despair over anything which comes against us in this life? Sadness, trials, and woes may come, but they should never rob us of our highest joy. Instead, we should have something more deeply instilled in us which allows us to look to the future with hope and joy.

Lord God, with all certainty I can look to the future in hope and in expectation because of what Christ did for me. Times of trial and sadness are natural, but nothing can steal my

inner joy because I have an eternal hope which is grounded in the truth of Jesus Christ's resurrection. How thankful I am for Your marvelous assurance, granted to me because of His work. No fear here! Amen.

For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. 2 Corinthians 7:5

As you read this letter from Paul, there is a journey that he refers to and then digresses from to insert key theology and personal notes. He noted this first in Chapter 1 -

"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." 2 Corinthians 1:8

After this, he diverted until Chapter 2 -

"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, ¹³ 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 Corinthians 2:12, 13

He now resumes this journey here with the words, "For indeed, when we came to Macedonia..." He has a story to tell, but he also has doctrine to relay and heartfelt notes of petition and encouragement to fill in as he does. There in Macedonia, he says that "our bodies had no rest, but were troubled on every side." He and his traveling companions were constantly harassed at every turn. And because of this, he says that "Outside *were* conflicts, inside *were* fears."

It needs to be remembered that italicized words are inserted for our clarity, but these words of Paul are more emphatic - "outside conflicts, inside fears." It is an explanation of "our bodies had no rest." They faced trouble on every side, and they were fraught with turmoil in the very fiber of their being, fearing for their safety as they traveled. Such was the life of an apostle. But the message of Christ impelled them forward.

Life application: Paul explains the plight of an apostle in today's verses. In the verses to come, he will show that the Lord was with them and directing them. Let us each be confident that the Lord is also with us in our own trials. He has a plan for us, and he is working it out in a marvelous way, even though it may not seem like it at times. Be confident that it is.

Heavenly Father, life is filled with such difficult trials. It seems as if everything goes wrong at once and then more goes wrong on top of that. Troubles don't come in manageable little divisions, but they come in heaps. And yet, I know that this is necessary to mold me. Help me in those times of stress to realize this. Instead of getting angry or upset, help me to see the barrage of grief as an opportunity to mature in who I am as a person and as a follower of You. Above all, thank You for the fantastic assurance that You are there with me in this. Amen.

Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 2 Corinthians 7:6

There is an emphasis which is unfortunately lacking in many English translations in this verse. God is put in an emphatic position at the end of the verse in the Greek - "The Comforter of the humble comforted us, even God" (Pulpit Commentary). Paul is taking what occurred in his own experience and he is assigning it, as it were, to being an attribute of God. It would be like someone finding a large nugget of gold on the side of the road and exclaiming, "The Giver of grace has lavished His grace upon us, even God!"

Paul's acknowledgment of God's comfort upon the downcast is uttered because of "the coming of Titus." In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul had noted that his spirit lacked any rest because of not finding Titus -

"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 Corinthians 2:13

Now, five chapters later, he reintroduces the narrative to explain to the Corinthians the immense comfort he found at the arrival of Titus. The reason for it will be explained in the verses ahead, but it centers on the message he brought concerning those in Corinth. Paul has skillfully and masterfully organized this letter in a way which would bring a slowly-emerging display of his personal feelings for the Corinthians, and his desire for them to be in a like-minded harmony, as a father to a son.

Life application: When you are downcast, where is it that you will turn? If the Bible reveals the heart of God for His children, then turn there. For times of true disheartenment, try the 42nd Psalm.

Heavenly Father, at those times when I am downtrodden and in dire straits of my soul, where am I to turn? I know already! You have provided us with Your word as a message of love to Your children. Why should I look for solace in a bottle? Why should I look for it

in an illicit relationship? No! The place I can always turn to for renewed joy is to Your superior word. Opening its pages and looking into Your heart, I find true comfort for my weary soul. Thank You for the Bible which sustains me until we meet on that glorious Day! Amen.

...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. 2 Corinthians 7:7

Paul just noted that he and those with him were comforted in the coming of Titus. Now building on that, he says that it was "not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you." They were certainly relieved to finally meet up with Titus, but when they met up, great news about the status of Corinth came with him. The words indicate that when Titus was there, he was greatly encouraged over the effect that Paul's words from his previous epistle had brought out in them.

For Paul and those with him, the words relayed by Titus "told us of your earnest desire." This would be referring to the desire for them to make the changes necessary to be right with the Lord and working together as a harmonious congregation. "Your mourning" indicates that the desired change was sincere. The word Paul uses for "mourning" is *odurmos*. It is found only here and in Matthew 2:18 and it indicates an actual audible lamentation. They literally broke down and wept at how their behavior had been the source of Paul's needed letter of discipline.

From there he notes "your zeal for me." The words were taken as they should have been. Instead of a commanding bully, he had written in fatherly tenderness. It was taken in that context and the zeal for those in Corinth to come in line with his fatherly advice was well received. In the hearing of all of this good news, he "rejoiced even more." His happiness at the coming of Titus was only bolstered by the news he brought!

Life application: The Bible says that the feet of those who bring good news are beautiful. Let us keep our feet looking as lovely as possible at all times!

Heavenly Father, if the feet of those who bring good news are beautiful, then I would ask that You make my feet radiant. Instill in me the burning desire to be a vessel which always carries the good news to others. Help me to be a person who encourages and builds others up, a help in times of need, and above all help me to never fail to proclaim the good news about Jesus to this dark and sin-stained world. With Your hand upon me, may my feet be simply glowing! Amen.

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.

2 Corinthians 7:8

Paul now refers to the previous letter that he sent to them by saying, "For even if I made you sorry with my letter..." The KJV erringly states "with a letter." There is an article in front of "letter" and therefore either "the letter" or "my letter" is appropriate here. He isn't referring to any letter, but to the specific letter which brought about their sadness.

In having sent it, sorrow came upon the recipients. Despite this, Paul could not feel regret over the sternness of the words he used. However, he does qualify his thought by noting that "I did regret it." At first, he realized that his words had been taken as a point of grief and anxiety by the Corinthians and he felt a bit remorseful about his comments. But when he saw the temporary nature of their remorse and the quick turning about in their conduct, he realized that no true regret was necessary.

This is explained clearly in his words, "For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while." Paul had no intention of bringing permanent unhappiness to the Corinthians. Instead, he intended to bring about true correction leading to restoration. When it became evident that this had happened, instead of regret, he certainly felt relief.

Life application: Sometimes a stern approach is necessary to wake someone, or even a group of people, up from their slumber. In many parts of the Bible, this is exactly what the Lord does for His people. He sends them sternness in order for them to turn back to Him. When the intended correction is realized, there can only be joy all around.

Heavenly Father, Your word is filled with examples of extremely direct rebuke towards Your people to get them to wake up, turn back to You, and proceed on a correct path. When correction is necessary, You are shown to hand it out. Israel was to learn this through two exiles and much grief. Help me to be one who is firm on doctrine as well, never yielding to anything less than total adherence to Your word. With this, I know that correction won't be needed. Guide me, O God. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 7:9

Paul now introduces repentance of the Corinthians into his thoughts. Unfortunately, the KJV makes the entire thought convoluted by using the term "repent" in both the previous verse and this one -

"For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season.

⁹ Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing."

However, two different words are used in verses 8 and 9. The "repent" of verse 8, is more appropriately "regret." Now in verse 9, it is correctly rendered "repentance." This might seem like hair-splitting, but Paul is making a point concerning emotions and doctrine which needs to be carefully worded.

He begins with the thought, "Now I rejoice." His heart has been made to flow with joy because of the situation at hand. The letter had made the Corinthians become sorrowful and to regret their actions. Now, to ensure that they understand that he wasn't happy about their sorrow, but rather the regret which the sorrow led to, he adds in, "...not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance." In regretting their actions, they had in turn repented of them. This is the intent of discipline and words of correction, and in this case it has worked.

To show this, he says, "For you were made sorry in a godly manner." There are different reasons for sorrow. In the case of what has occurred, their sorrow is based on a right response to proper chastisement. All we need to do is think of our own children. If we punish them for stealing, they will be sorrowful. If they repent of their stealing and steal no longer, then they have united their regret with true repentance. This is the same line of thought that Paul conveys here. The parents aren't happy about their child's sorrow, but they are happy about what the sorrow has led to.

Paul finishes this thought with, "... that you might suffer loss from us in nothing." What he is saying is that no true harm came to the Corinthians by Paul's letter of correction. Rather than loss, it is the intent of him and the other apostles that they receive gain, not suffer loss. When correction is properly acted upon, then gain is the result. Such is the case now with the Corinthians.

Life application: It can be difficult to punish those around us that we love. But it is at times necessary. Children need right direction and even stern correction to keep them from straying into even worse situations. Those in the church will likewise need correction when they stray from what is acceptable to the Lord as is revealed in His word. When a pastor or group of church members has determined correction is necessary, be ready to evaluate the situation and support the decision if it is truly in line with precepts laid out in the Bible.

Heavenly Father, how difficult it is to receive correction for things we have done wrong, but Your word tells us that we should rejoice when we are chastened because You are dealing with us as sons. You discipline us according to what is best and never out of vindictiveness. Thank You for Your kind hand of correction upon us. Help us to take such times in the proper light and to adjust our actions so that we are completely pleasing to You. Amen.

For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 2 Corinthians 7:10

Many English translations deviate from the Greek in the structure of this verse. There is no adverb in it. Using the word "godly" causes the verse to be cumbersome and unnatural. The New Living Translation makes it much easier to understand -

"For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death."

The "godly sorrow" that Paul is speaking of is a sorrow that explains verses 8 and 9. Paul made them sorry with his letter, but there was a good reason for it. When they regretted their ways and then repented, the purpose was realized. This is exactly what Paul is now explaining to them. Through the sorrow that God would want in them, they repented of their actions. It is a repentance that would not be regretted because it was in line with what God intended for them in the first place.

In a non-believer, such sorrow will lead towards salvation. In a believer, it will lead towards restoration and renewed fraternity between God and His wayward child. For the most part, Paul was writing his letter to saved believers at Corinth, but how could a non-believer come to know Christ with no correct example to follow? Therefore, this "salvation" isn't speaking of those who were already saved, but of those who still

needed to be saved. Those who repent will not regret their repentance because it will lead to salvation.

It must be remembered though that salvation is based on faith in what Christ did, not on works. One cannot be saved by merely repenting from sin. If a drunk gives up drinking and yet has no faith in Christ, he will never be saved. We cannot use this verse as a verse which says "repentance leads to salvation" in and of itself. Instead, it is the grace of Christ which saves. The repentance of a sin may lead to faith in Him, or it may not. Either way, it is only by grace through faith that one is saved.

On the other hand, there is a sorrow of the world that he also writes about. There are many types of sorrows in the natural world. If we are sorry over losing a bank account full of money, that doesn't lead us to God. Instead, it just leads us to frustration and bitterness. If we are sorry over losing our girlfriend, that hasn't helped us in our spiritual life at all. Instead, it is simply a sorrow which is natural and of this world.

Or let's go back and revisit the drunk from the previous paragraph. If he is sorry for being a drunk because it led him to lose his job, he may give up drinking and get his job back. In this, he may become proud and say, "Look at what I have done." This sorrow then only produced death in him. Ultimately, through such sorrow there can only be regret. In the end, it produces nothing concerning salvation, but it continues to produce death in the unbeliever.

Life application: Paul's words concerning the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience are directed towards things which are contrary to His holy character and which separate us from Him. And so, we can see that not all sorrow is bad. Those who refuse to show sorrow over their sin show that they have no care or regard for their Creator. Only when we have sorrow for our actions can we turn from them and be saved from them.

Heavenly Father, please break our hearts over the secret sins of our lives. Help us to be sorrowful for doing that which is displeasing to You and help us to turn from those things so that we will bring joy to Your heart. You have given us Your word which tells us what You desire, but our hearts are hard and calloused. And so, soften us and turn us to the right, holy, and pure living which will bring Your favor and great reward! Amen.

For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced 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. 2 Corinthians 7:11

Paul's words in this verse show the fulfillment of the words of the previous verse in the believers at Corinth. That verse said, "For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted..." And sure enough, Paul confirms that this has been evidenced in them as seen in the words, "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner."

After this introductory statement, he lists the things which he had heard about from Titus concerning them. He begins with, "What diligence it produced in you." The word he uses indicates speed or haste. They quickly made every effort to correct those things which were wrong and to restore the congregation to a doctrinally sound one.

"*What clearing of yourselves*" is the Greek word *apologia*. It is a logical defense of the actions they have taken. The word is used particularly in a court of law when clearing oneself of charges. In the case of the Corinthians, they took necessary action and have made their defense based on the actions they took.

"*What indignation*" uses a word, *aganaktésis*, which is found only here in the NT. The indignation certainly wasn't against Paul or his words of correction, and they were probably not against the offender directly either. Rather, based on Paul's words, their indignation arose against the sin which existed. Once it was brought to their eyes, they realized the seriousness of it.

"*What fear*" wouldn't be connected to condemnation. Paul writes elsewhere that there is now no condemnation for the believer in Christ. However, for the sake of the church, there was fear. It is what any congregant should feel as they see sin entering the body. As Paul says in Galatians 5:9, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." In the book of Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus speaks of the consequences of a church when it departs from sound doctrine. The congregation in Corinth feared and so they made the necessary corrections.

"*What vehement desire*" indicates their desire to clear their name and to be shown in right standing before the Lord and in the eyes of their beloved Apostle Paul. He was as a father in the faith to them and his words tugged at their hearts. Paul was their faithful friend and they worked towards receiving his approval of their correct doctrine.

"*What zeal*" must certainly be referring to their desire to honor the Lord and bring Him the glory he is due. With the sin which had infected their congregation, they realized this wasn't possible. And so, they zealously worked to get the matter corrected.

"*What* vindication!" The KJV has the most unfortunate rendering here of, "What revenge!" This is either an anachronism, or it is simply a mistranslation. Revenge is not the idea here but rather exoneration. They had worked to be exonerated of the offense which existed in their congregation. Paul's words show that they had, in fact, accomplished this.

He sums up the thought with, "In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter." The Corinthians had worked diligently to clear their names individually and collectively so that they would be a doctrinally sound congregation, living in accord with the admonishments and exhortations of their beloved brother Paul. They did this because they knew that he carried with him the authority of their beloved Lord and Savior.

Life application: Jesus speaks strong words of warning to the seven churches that He addresses in Revelation. In those words of warning are the corrections they need in order to be in a right relationship with Him. Take time to read those seven letters and to see if your own congregation falls short in any precept mentioned there. If so, be sure to bring it to the attention of the elders or pastor. He loves us enough to warn us in advance of what is necessary to be in a right standing with Him. Let us love Him enough to be obedient to His words.

Heavenly Father, I sure wish churches would take time to read the seven letters to the seven churches which are contained in Revelation 2 and 3. It is appalling to see the moral perversion, wickedness, and lack of love for the commands of Christ which permeate the churches of the world today. How many have already had their lampstands removed? How many are heading there now? Open our eyes Lord! Open our hearts Lord! Give us the desire to turn our congregations back to holy and right living. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 7:12

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians contains references to a situation of sexual immorality which was so distasteful that it is "not even named among the Gentiles." In other words, it was something that even Gentiles would consider perverse. From his words to them in that chapter, he makes it clear that his main intent was to cure the entire congregation of reveling in what occurred. In verse 6, he said, "Your glorying *is* not good."

It was an overall rebuke to the church. With that in mind, he begins with, "Therefore..." He is referring to the entire chapter so far as a basis for his words now. This is true even from verse 1 which said, "...let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

For the perfecting of such holiness, along with everything else he has spoken of here, he says, "...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." He is clear that the letter wasn't meant as a rant against the offender or a defense for the offended (although these issues would be handled properly if the congregation took the necessary action he gave). Rather, the overall intent of his words was "that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you."

His concern was for the overall congregation and His care of them in the sight of God. Going back and reading 1 Corinthians 5, this is wholly evident. For Him to say to them "that a little leaven leavens the whole lump" implies that he was concerned about the entire lump of dough, not just one piece of bread broken off from the lump. Paul's care for the entire body is what was evident, and so this is what he is explaining to them now.

Life application: Misunderstandings arise because people often don't take the time to thoroughly investigate a matter. When this happens, care needs to be taken in order to resolve the misunderstanding. Don't be over-excited when responding to others in matters of such difficulty. Instead, think through your response in the life of Christian fraternity.

Lord God, how often offenses are taken because of misunderstandings, especially when people don't take the time to simply research a matter. At times like this, help me to be a person who can properly evaluate the situation and bring the disaffected parties back to a place of fraternity and love. The last thing we need in this world is more contention and division. Thank You for being with me in such times. Amen.

Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

2 Corinthians 7:13

In the previous verse, Paul said that the intent of his first letter to the Corinthians was so that "care for you in the sight of God might appear to you." He had intended to demonstrate his care for them in order to give them soundness and comfort in their

congregation. When Titus arrived, his words told them that the letter had its intended effect. Because of this, Paul was in turn comforted in the comfort they received.

Until hearing from Titus, he was certainly anxious about how the letter was received. The good news was that instead of a great battle of words beginning between the two parties, there was comfort. Further, Titus was so overjoyed at how things turned out that Paul says, "...we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus."

The reason for this is that "his spirit has been refreshed by you all." The word for "has been refreshed" is in the perfect tense in the Greek. Thus, some older translations miss the fullness of the effect it had on him when they translate it as "was refreshed." Titus wasn't just comforted at the time of his visit, but he remained so even until his coming to Paul. There was a continuance in his state which then was transferred to Paul and his associates.

Paul and everyone with him were overjoyed because things had worked out in a positive light. His words to them now are given to show that he was convinced that there was peace on all sides and that no harm had come to their relationship.

Life application: Written letters and emails can often be misinterpreted because emotions do not carry through these mediums. When there is any chance of such misperceptions, either extra wording or even a follow-up telephone call may be needed to ensure that things are taken in the proper light. Words can truly hurt, so be attentive to sentence structure and the specific words that you use in your communications.

Lord God, how many times have things that I have written to others been taken in the wrong way! Emotions don't always transfer in letters. And so help me to be careful with how I word things, adding in whatever is necessary to ensure that what I say is received in the way I had intended. And should this not happen, give me wisdom in how I deal with someone who misinterprets my words so that even greater offense doesn't arise. My heart's goal is to always exalt You, even in the letters I write. So be with me in this Lord. Amen.

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.

2 Corinthians 7:14

From this verse, it is apparent that Paul had boasted in advance that the Corinthians would be receptive to his letter and that things would turn out well in the end. It gives

the impression that Titus may have been reticent to be a messenger heading into the lion's den. But Paul reassured him that all would be fine, boasting of the Corinthian's ability to correct that which was faulty and to work together in a harmonious manner in the process.

And in his boastings to Titus, the result was that "I am not ashamed." However, this rendering does not give the correct sense of the tense. It should rather say "I was not shamed" (Ellicott). In other words, the NKJV makes it sound like Paul is currently not ashamed of his boasting. That makes no real sense because the event is past. Rather, Paul was proven to be correct in his boasting and was not put to shame by having things turn out in a manner differently than he had told Titus they would.

As a confirmation of this, he continues with, "But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true." Paul's letter of correction was based on that which was truthful. The things that needed to be addressed were correct and right. When the Corinthians read the letter, they took it in that light and worked to correct their deficiencies as appropriate. And so, just as Paul's letter was in truth, Titus found out that the boasting Paul made concerning the Corinthians was also true. Paul was vindicated in both ways by the words he spoke.

The words of this verse take us all the way back to his words in Chapter 1. In verses 15-18, Paul defended his actions of not coming back to visit the Corinthians as he had originally planned. Because of this, there was the impression that he took their situation lightly. However, his words to them here show that this was not the case. The fact that he boasted to Titus, in advance, of how things would turn out showed that those in Corinth were not only right at the center of Paul's attention, but that they were there in a positive, not a negative way.

Life application: Paul looked at the Corinthian church with the very best intentions and in the belief that they would do the right thing. In this, he was vindicated in his boasting of them. Although we shouldn't let ourselves get duped by others, it is right that we give the benefit of the doubt whenever possible. When we do, especially when it is done in the presence of others who can substantiate later what we have said, we will then have a firm base on which to work with when dealing with those we have trusted. This can only increase the harmony between the two parties in future dealings.

Lord, sometimes I get so caught up in my dealings with others that I fail to take the time to simply praise You. Today, I just want to tell You how great You are. I praise You for Your faithfulness, goodness, and Your hand of grace upon my life. Even in the darkest

valleys I know that You have been there with me. You have never left me; You have never forsaken me. Receive the thanks and praise of Your undeserving servant. All praise, glory, and honor belong to You. Amen.

And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. 2 Corinthians 7:15

Because of his visit to the Corinthians and their response to that visit, Titus' affections towards them grew in the most tender and heartfelt way. There was a true bond forged which included a deep and stirring attachment to them. The word for "affections" here is the same one that he used in verse 6:12 concerning the affections of the Corinthians towards Paul and his associates. Paul is showing that Titus was truly stirred in his love for them during their encounter.

After saying this, he gives the reason for it. Titus, probably sitting there with Paul and explaining all that occurred, surely related how he remembered "the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him." The term "fear and trembling" is a phrase Paul uses several times to convey the deepest sort of feelings. The exact same term is used by him in 1 Corinthians 2:3, Ephesians 6:5, and in Philippians 2:12. Instead of a belligerent attitude, Titus had been welcomed with respect, reverence, and a desire to correct the deficiencies that were highlighted by Paul.

Life application: When reading the Bible, certain phrases are often repeated. Paul's words "fear and trembling" in this verse can be more fully understood and appreciated by comparing the same phrase elsewhere. Don't be in a hurry to rush through your Bible studies, but instead take time to refer to other passages or phrases which can help you understand the meaning and intent of what is being relayed.

Heavenly Father, help me to be thorough in my Bible studies and to not rush through passages which are difficult. Instead, help me to think on why they are there and how they ultimately point to Christ. There is a reason for every word You have placed in Scripture, and I desire to know and understand it all. Help me to be diligent in my pursuit of Your precious and superior word. Amen.

Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything. 2 Corinthians 7:16

Paul sums up the thoughts of this chapter with words of relief. Titus had been sent, good things had been relayed back to Paul, and harmony was reestablished between the two parties. Because of this, he says that "I rejoice that I have confidence in you in

everything." The Greek here is literally telling us that Paul intends, "...that in everything I am of good courage concerning (literally, 'in the case of') you,' as contrasted with my former doubts concerning you." (Jamieson-Faucett-Brown).

Paul doubted if those in Corinth would return to the proper and sound path, but his doubts were ended, and he was heartily encouraged once again through the events described in this chapter. Now that this matter is behind him, he will continue on with the epistle in another direction.

Life application: Reading the words of Paul helps us to solidify how we are to conduct our lives in a proper New Testament context. His words are prescriptive and authoritative. But even in his writings are descriptive passages which show us how his theology was expressed towards others. These actually help us to get a better grounding in his prescriptive words as well. Be sure to study Paul for proper doctrine.

Heavenly Father, I know that all Scripture has been breathed out by You and it is useful for doctrine and learning, but I also know that it doesn't all apply in the same way at the same time. Help me to properly direct my theology to the areas which are intended for me as a believer in the finished work of Christ. Help me to never set aside the grace He has granted to return to futile works which can only distance me from You. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 Corinthians 8:1

Having settled the issue of Chapter 7, Paul now turns to the subject of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. It is a collection that he was personally coordinating and preparing to take, along with designated representatives, to Jerusalem. In order to spur on the Corinthians in their promised giving, he brings in what has occurred in the churches of Macedonia.

To set this up, he calls those in Corinth "brethren" again. He has and will continue to endear himself to them in order to keep the idea of brotherly affection alive throughout the epistle. Through sternness or through petition, he calls them "brethren" to remind them of their favored status in his eyes. After so addressing them, he says that "we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches in Macedonia."

Grace is unmerited favor. God had lavished this upon them, and Paul will continue to explain it in the verses ahead. As God was graceful to them, then it would be right that they would turn and grant grace as well.

By bringing in the Macedonian churches in this way, it will allow for a little "healthy competition" between the Macedonians and the Corinthians. In this, Paul knows that the gift he will take to Jerusalem can only be increased. He is a wise and careful soul, doing the work of the Lord in a remarkable way!

Life application: There is nothing wrong with stimulating others to do their best and encouraging others through comparisons in order to do so. However, it is wrong to manipulate people to give. Unfortunately, many churches do manipulate their congregants through inappropriately handling the Bible or shaming them into giving. If you're in such a church, find another one which puts the highest value on what is right and proper, not on money.

Heavenly Father, help me to never proclaim anything but the truth of Your word. Grant me wisdom to rightly divide it and to never mishandle it in order to improperly benefit from others. Instead, help me to be a sound teacher that leads others down the road of Right Doctrine and directly into the loving arms of Christ Jesus the Lord. In all ways, may You be glorified through Your people as they pursue You through Your superior word. Amen.

...that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 2 Corinthians 8:2

Speaking of those in Macedonia (as Paul continues from verse 1), he says the grace of God was bestowed upon them "in a great trial of affliction..." That seems contradictory, but it is not. John Chrysostom says that "They were not simply afflicted, but in such a way as also to become approved by their endurance."

Through their affliction, they were being molded. It is a theme which permeates all of Scripture. This affliction is partially noted in Acts 16:19, 20 and in Acts 17:5, 6. Further, Paul mentions the following to those in Thessalonica -

"For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans..." 1 Thessalonians 2:14

It is in this state of affliction that Paul continues with the words "...the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality." The deep poverty which permeated those in Macedonia came about for a couple reasons. The first is that in their persecution, they may have been denied suitable employment or even robbed of their goods. Although written to the Hebrew believers, the same principle may have applied to the Gentiles which is noted in Hebrews 10 -

"...for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven." Hebrews 10:34

Another reason is that "Macedonia and Achaia never recovered from the three wars between Caesar and Pompeius, between the Triumvirs and Brutus and Cassius, and between Augustus and Antonius. Under Tiberius, they petitioned for a diminution of their burdens, and were accordingly transferred for a time from the jurisdiction of the senate to that of the emperor, as involving a less heavy taxation." Charles Ellicott

Despite these things, they gave in a great way to sustain the saints in Jerusalem. As the Pulpit Commentary notes, "Their joy overflowed their affliction, and their liberality overflowed their poverty." In this they had a singleness of purpose in providing a substantial donation for what they believed was a truly worthy cause.

Life application: It is often those who make the least who give the most. As wealth increases, the amount given percent-wise tends to drop. And so, giving becomes less about what hurts than what will keep from hurting. Each should give as they feel is appropriate and without compulsion, but the wealthy who give large amounts should not look down on the poor who give small amounts. In the end, they may be giving more than the wealthy on a comparative basis.

Heavenly Father, help me to not be stingy in giving for the needs of others. It is often difficult to know when to give, how much to give, and whether the gift is given to someone who is truly needy. Be with me in my gifts and offerings and help me to wisely handle, but freely pass on, the earnings that You have entrusted to me. Amen.

For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they* were freely willing, 2 Corinthians 8:3

Speaking of the giving by the Macedonians, a group who had little to begin with, Paul says "I bear witness" about them. He knew them and he personally knew of the circumstances concerning the gift they had offered. It was "according to *their* ability." This means that they gave as they were able. It is a precept he will lay down in the next chapter for those in Corinth (and thus for us when we give) -

"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7

If this was all that was recorded of their giving, we would know that they had done well and that their gift was a sufficient one to represent them as a faithful flock. However, this is not all that is said about it. Paul continues by saying that they gave "according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing." In the Greek, there is a stress which is lacking in the English. Paul briskly omits the verb and so the adjective stands alone. In this then, he shows the superlative nature of the gift.

Regardless of the size of it, it was one which actually exceeded the normal ability of these people to give. In other words, they would have to do with less in their normal lives in order to be able to afford this gift given according to the call on their spiritual lives; they exceeded the budget for any normal operating of their day-to-day life. And not only that, but they did it without compulsion of any kind. The gift was mentioned, the reason for it was given, and without any external pressure, they simply were moved to act.

Life application: How willing are you to tend to the church, pastor, or Bible teacher who ministers to you? Have you given according to your means in order to ensure that their needs are met? They are working in the most important matter of human existence in order to bring God's revelation of Himself to you. Be sure to act in a manner which is in accord with that by gratefully returning care and provision to them.

Lord God, in reading about the gift which the Macedonians gave to the saints in Jerusalem, I am reminded that they gave beyond their ability and without compulsion. Please give me the same heart towards those who have ministered to me, or those who are partly cared for by me in foreign lands, serving as missionaries. Grant me the willing heart to take care of the physical needs of those who take care of others' spiritual needs. Amen.

...imploing us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 2 Corinthians 8:4

The idea in this verse is that the Macedonians almost begged to be allowed to participate in adding to the gift which was being collected for the Jerusalem saints. It is as if Paul said to them, "I'm gathering together a gift for the saints in Jerusalem because they are really in dire straits." On hearing this, the Macedonians - without any prompting - then said, "Well let us help!" From there, Paul may have said, "Listen, you all are almost in the same condition as them." In response they would then have begged, "Please, please allow us to give this gift."

Although that is only a possible scenario for what occurred, it shows the general tenor of Paul's words. The Macedonians prayed that they could be a part of what was going on. It shows a true, heartfelt attitude that excluded any sense of compulsion on Paul's part. He simply said what he was doing and they immediately desired to participate.

Life application: When people feel giving is necessary, they will give. If they are the stingy sort and are placed under a guilt-trip, the only thing that will happen is that resentment will build up in them. Begging for, or mandating, something that should be voluntarily given is not a sound approach to meeting the needs of the saints. It may take care of the immediate need, but it is bound to cause other problems down the line.

Lord God, You are worthy of praise! And so today I praise You! Great are You O God. Marvelous are Your works. Rejoice in the words I utter, the actions I take, and the heart which yearns for You. May my every thought and deed be an act of praise and worship

to You, my heavenly Father. Thank You above all for the greatest Gift... thank You for Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God. 2 Corinthians 8:5

Paul is still speaking of those in Macedonia concerning their determination to give a gift for the benefit of the saints in Jerusalem. In the previous verse, he said they were "imploping us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." Adding to that now, he says that this was "not *only* as we had hoped."

Having learned of their zeal to give, they expected this poor congregation to put forward a small amount as an offering. Instead, they had far exceeded what they thought would be given. And more than that, "they first gave themselves to the Lord." The congregation as a whole consecrated themselves to the matter, determining that what they had was set apart to the Lord and therefore everything about the gift was sacred. They put their energy, their time, and their ability into preparing the gift. The entire process was considered as to the Lord.

But Paul goes further and says that they gave themselves "to us by the will of God." In this gift, they deferred to the directions and wishes of the apostles for how it was to be gathered and administered. Instead of insisting that they handle the process as if out of fear of it being mishandled, they trusted the apostles and their authority in the matter, knowing that they had been ordained by the will of God.

In this, those in Macedonia had followed a sound pattern of yielding themselves to God completely and wholly, understanding that it all came from Him. They trusted that it would be handled appropriately because it was He who selected the apostles and therefore they knew they would be acting in accord with His will.

Life application: The amount of the Macedonian's love for the Lord and their trust for the apostles is evident in this verse. However, it needs to be understood that not all who claim they are appointed by God actually are. There are no apostles today. Anyone can get ordained as a minister and act in a pious manner. Christians, individually and collectively as a congregation, need to carefully evaluate each individual who seeks to obtain money from them. In all things, be willing to give heartily, but do so cautiously.

Heavenly Father, what I have come from You and belongs to You. And so, help me to be wise in how I use my time, abilities, and possessions. Keep me from being stingy towards those with true needs, but also keep me from getting snookered by folks who would misuse a gift or offering I would make. As it is all Yours, fill me with wisdom to handle what is Yours with the greatest care. Amen.

So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 2 Corinthians 8:6

The idea of Paul's words here is that because of the immense generosity of those in Macedonia, the apostles were greatly encouraged in the idea of gathering the gift for the saints in Jerusalem. They may not have expected such an immense outpouring of generosity. However, if the poor churches of Macedonia could give such a marvelous gift, then perhaps it would be an exceedingly great one when the other offerings of other churches were added into it.

With this renewed sense of vigor, it says, "...we urged Titus." As in other instances, Titus has been the "front man" for such things. He is sent with the desires of the apostles, or with their instructions for various things. As he was the one who brought back the report from the Corinthians which precipitated the writing of this epistle, he would be the logical choice to go back and finish the front work for the offering. As it says, "...that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well."

"This grace" is certainly speaking of the gift which those in Corinth had promised. With the great show of giving in Macedonia, Paul was truly encouraged to get about the business of a collection from the Corinthians. In addition to the gift itself, the words "this grace" may also be hinting at the other principle tenets of the letter as well. In combining the gift with the doctrinal instruction, there would be a smoothing over of both as they were being worked on at the same time.

What is implied in the coming verses is that the Corinthians had talked openly and in a large way about helping out in the offering Paul is discussing. By sending Titus along with this letter, he would be preparing them ahead of time for his arrival and keeping them from any embarrassing shortfalls in the actual gift compared to the grand promises of the past.

Life application: Paul's use of Titus as a front man for handling the issues which have arisen in Corinth is a wise one. It avoids confrontation by having the issues settled

without his personal intervention. Keeping such matters at the lowest level possible will normally avoid hierarchal conflicts which may otherwise arise.

Lord God, at times there are trials and difficulties within given congregations which can easily lead to people leaving the church or even having the church divide. Wisdom is needed at such times, but it must be wisdom based on Your word. Help us to remember to always go to the manual of instruction You have given us and to use those guidelines. Relying on this, along with prayer to Your throne of grace, is always the best avenue to take. Help us to rely on You as we should. Thank You Lord. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 8:7

Paul has been speaking to the Corinthians in a narrative fashion, explaining the events which have occurred concerning the giving of those in Macedonia. He now turns to exhortation in his address to them in order to spur them on to giving. In his words, he gives them hearty acknowledgments of their strengths in Christ.

He says first, "But as you abound in everything..." It is a way of saying that they have been richly supplied in so many ways. Though the list he will give includes spiritual gifts, he is certainly making a contrast to the "deep poverty" of the Macedonians which he previously mentioned. Due to their abounding (which surely included physical blessings as well as spiritual blessings), they should be able to supply a great gift to the saints in Jerusalem, just as those in Macedonia did.

He notes their "faith," "speech," "knowledge," "diligence," and "love." He has addressed these attributes in one way or another already, and now he combines them to show how greatly God has lavished His grace upon them. Now he turns and exhorts them to "see that you abound in this grace also" when speaking of giving. It would be contrary for them to possess so many wonderful abilities and yet fail in the ability to share their material wealth with those who had less than they did.

God had supplied their every need, and now they were being shown a need in others that they could participate in alleviating. Paul has carefully tied all of these things into one summary exhortation to show them that they were in fact blessed in a marvelous way, and so they should be able to respond out of their abundance.

Life application: How much do you feel you have been blessed by the Lord? Have you considered that the gifts which have been lavished down upon you have been provided

so that you could turn and help others? One can demonstrate their gratefulness to God by returning a portion of that to help in the needs of others.

Heavenly Father, You certainly have blessed me in a multitude of ways. I cannot thank You enough for every good gift which has rained down from Your hand of grace. Please help me to wisely pass on what I have received, helping others using the same gifts which You have granted to me. Help me to be one who freely passes on without attaching strings to the gifts as they go. They came freely from You; help me to freely hand them out as well. Amen.

I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 2 Corinthians 8:8

Paul adds in a caveat to his words of the previous verses concerning the giving of a gift to the saints in Jerusalem. He had shown how great the gift of the Macedonians was despite their immense poverty in order to spur them on to giving as well. Also, in the previous verse, he challenged them to exceed in the gift of giving, just as they had exceeded in other gifts.

However, this was a challenge or even a plea, but it was "not by commandment." The implication is that he had no instructions from the Lord concerning such a collection and he also had no desire to use his apostolic authority in a manner which would impose a collection on them. Rather, he made it a challenge in "testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others."

The word for "sincerity" here is *gnésios*. It is a word used only by Paul in the New Testament and it is only used four times. It is the contracted form of the word *genesios* which means "legitimately born" and thus "genuine." For example, he calls Timothy his lawful son in the faith in 1 Timothy 1:2. Paul is testing the "genuineness" of their love in this challenge by comparing it to the earnestness of others, meaning those such as the Macedonians.

He has tactfully used his words about the Macedonians to spur the Corinthians on as if in an athletic challenge. In essence, "Who will prevail in this great challenge?"

Life application: There is nothing wrong with spurring the members of a congregation on to greater giving. However, to do so with implied or actual commands which do not exist is inappropriate. New Testament churches have no standing orders concerning giving other than a subjective "give as you have prospered." Tithing is not something

mandated in the New Testament. Instead, it was annulled along with the entire Old Testament law.

Lord God, I am so grateful that You allow us to give according to how we feel we have been blessed. Tithing no longer applies in the New Testament churches. Instead, we can give based on the gratitude we have for the grace which has been lavished upon us. And so, Lord, help our hearts to understand the enormity of what Christ did for us. Help us to give according to the greatness of His sacrifice - willingly and faithfully. Amen.

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.

2 Corinthians 8:9

Context is important to understand Paul's introduction of this verse. He has been speaking to the Corinthians about giving for the collection of the saints in Jerusalem. He has mentioned the extreme poverty of those in Macedonia, but that they gave in an immense way out of their poverty. Now, to show the highest form of giving ever known, he turns to the greatest example of it; that of Christ Jesus.

He begins with "For you know." The message of what Christ did was known to the Corinthians, but now Paul will explain it in a new way to them, unpacking the mystery of Christ in a way which will hopefully spur them on to a great demonstration of giving as well. Expanding on his words we read, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." In verse 7, he said this to them -

"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."

In order to show them how to conduct themselves "in this grace also" he reminds them of the same type of grace seen in the Lord. This then is speaking less of the theological idea of grace and more of the act of generosity and giving, which he mentioned to the Corinthians in verse 7. And so, we could paraphrase this, "For you know the generous giving of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In explanation of this, he says "that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." This is something that we often think about when considering Christ, but not in any specific sense. And so Paul says it directly to help us think it through directly. He possessed all of heaven's riches, power, and authority, and yet He voluntarily gave it all up for our sakes.

The Greek word for "He became poor" is in the aorist tense and it therefore refers to the very moment when He became a Man. He set aside all of the glory and splendor of heaven and united with the dust which He created. He became weak and poor in order to demonstrate His love for us. The word "poor" is defined by HELPS Word Studies -

"...to become utterly poor (destitute); hence, to become extremely *vulnerable* ("*helpless*")."

As a human baby, He lay utterly helpless. As a child of Joseph and Mary, He was in such poverty that the sacrifice recorded in Luke 2, which is offered for purification according to the law, was "two turtledoves." Such a sacrifice was allowed for the very poorest people of the land who could not afford a lamb offering (see Leviticus 12:8).

From His entrance into the world, and for the rest of His life, He remained completely poor, even as a beggar would live. In Luke 8:3, it says that there were certain women "and many others who provided for Him from their substance." This state of abject poverty was the state of His life and yet in John 16:15, He told the apostles that "all things that the Father has are mine." In His earthly life, heaven's riches were set aside in order to accomplish His mission for the very creatures who had continuously shunned Him. His state of going from heaven's throne to the footstool of the earth is well summed up in Philippians 2:6-8.

Paul finishes his word to them showing that all of this was accomplished so "that you through His poverty might become rich." Those at Corinth may have wondered what type of giving would be appropriate. Paul showed them that the ultimate example of giving is found in Christ who had redeemed them. There is no amount they could give that would ever be truly exhausted. They had been raised to heaven itself and to all of its riches because of Christ Jesus. Their true wealth would never end and so whatever they gave would not affect them in any permanent sense.

Life application: Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning giving. In doing so, he wrote to us also. We are included in that epistle if we have called on Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should remember that Christ gave up everything for us in order to live in this temporary world. As this is so, we should have no problem giving up any part of this temporary world because He has given all things to us. We have an eternal future with an everlasting fount of riches ahead of us.

Heavenly Father, Christ Jesus my Lord gave up all things in order to redeem me from this fallen world. He gave up heaven's riches itself; coming and living a life of abject poverty so that I could become rich. And I am! I have eternal life ahead of me which contains an everlasting fount of wealth bubbling up from it. Because of this, help me to not get stuck in the temporary and fading wealth of this world. Help me to give freely of myself, my abilities, and my possessions. May the life I live for Jesus become an acknowledgment of my gratitude for the life He lived for me. Amen.

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; 2 Corinthians 8:10

Paul is very careful to make a distinction between his advice and the Lord's commands. This follows the same line of wording then as verse 8 which said, "I speak not by commandment..." Despite being an apostle, he never wanted to overstep his bounds of authority. However, he also was one wise in the way of conducting such affairs and so he voluntarily continues with his advice.

In his counsel he says, "It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago." Though the idea won't be finished until the next verse, we get enough sense of what Paul means now. The Corinthians had made it known a year earlier that they desired to assist in this offering. Because they had so spoken, he desired that they now fulfill what they indicated.

However, Paul inverts what we would naturally consider the normal line of reasoning. It would be more expected for him to say, "What you desired to do, you should now do." Instead, he puts the doing ahead of the willingness to do. He may be making an ironic statement to them that they are the ones who now have their priorities out of order. Why should they be prompted to do what they had said they would do?

Another option is that their willingness to make a collection should now be turned into an even greater collection than originally intended, adding a year of willingness to a moment of promise. Paul will tell them in the next chapter that God loves a cheerful giver. In their cheerfulness to promise, they should also be cheerful in the fulfillment of the promise.

In his advice, there is always the notion that even if the advice is personal, he is still an apostle who is speaking the words that God intends for His sheep. Paul has been given care of those sheep, and therefore his words should be trusted and acted upon.

Life application: We have Paul's words as doctrine for the church age. Let us pay heed to them as if we believe that they are exactly what the Bible reveals they are - the very words of God which are intended to guide us in holy and right living.

Heavenly Father, help me to ensure that my actions are in line with my words. If I make a promise, help me to keep that promise. If I say I will handle a problem, then give me the ability to handle it and the desire to see it through to its completion. As I have called on Christ, what I do will reflect on Him in other's eyes. Help me never to tarnish that view of my wonderful Lord and Savior. Amen.

...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*. 2 Corinthians 8:11

Paul's last verse, which continues on in this one said, "It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago." He completes the thought beginning with "but." There was a desire to act, but then action went no further. Now he admonishes them to act, spurring them on as the time for the collection drew near. In essence, "Now is the time that 'you also must complete the doing of it.'"

Words of action without follow-up are simply vapor that disappears into the air. Nobody is helped through them, and people will gauge another's quality of their character, at least in a large measure, from the action or the lack of action which arises based on the words spoken. In order to ensure that the Corinthians will be viewed in a positive light in this respect, he continues with "that as *there was* a readiness to desire it, so *there also may be* a completion out of what *you have*."

The Corinthians, about a year earlier, eagerly spoke their intentions to help the saints in Jerusalem. However, nothing further had come about from their words and a year had slipped by. The time for finally proving their intent had come. Should they not fulfill their words, the gift taken to Jerusalem would be smaller and there would be no commendation for those in Corinth, no letter of thanks, and no gratitude for their loving assistance. The words they spoke would turn out to be that disappearing breath which merely faded away.

Concerning the words "out of what you have," Vincent's Word Studies notes that "Meyer justly remarks that it would be an indelicate compliment to the inclination of the readers, that it had originated from their possession. Render, according to your ability." In other words, translating this "out of what you have" makes it sound like anything given from them excluded God's hand of grace in it. But all things originally

come from God and therefore by restating it to say "according to your ability" allows for the hand of God to be seen in what was given to them as being passed on from them. This then would be perfectly in line with Paul's note concerning the giving of the Macedonians in verses 1-5.

Life application: If you are going to boast about doing something, it is right that you follow up by doing it. Better yet, don't boast at all. Just do.

Lord God, grant me a heart of humility. Amen.

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.* 2 Corinthians 8:12

Paul now makes a point to the Corinthians not unlike that made by the Lord in Luke 21:1-4 -

"And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, ² and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. ³ So He said, 'Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; ⁴ for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.'"

The NKJV here follows after the KJV by indicating that if there is "first" a willing mind. This is in error regarding Paul's intent. He is not saying this as if indicating a sequence of events in time. Instead, he intends to convey the matter in a positional way. Most other translations rightly say something to the effect that, "...if the willingness is there," or "...if the eagerness is there," etc.

Paul is saying that the disposition of the individual is what makes an offering acceptable or not, regardless of the size of the gift. If one eagerly, and with a right heart, gives just thirty cents, they are doing well. However, if someone gives one million dollars with the wrong intent, why would they be credited with an acceptable gift? The world focuses on the size of the gift, but God focuses on the intent behind it.

Understanding this, we can see that a gift is based on the heart of the giver, and it is "according to what one has." The poor man with little can still give a grand gift out of his few possessions. It is accepted then "not according to what he does not have." If it was, then only the gifts of the wealthy would be acceptable regardless of the amount given in comparison to the amount they possess.

Life application: If your heart is right in your giving, then you will be blessed as you give.

Heavenly Father, the account of the poor widow who gave out of her poverty tells me that You look on our hearts and not on our bank accounts. Help me to remember this and to offer my life, in its entirety, to You willingly and freely. Help me to use the time I have, the talents I possess, and the things that I have earned through a life of work, to Your glory. Let my heart be devoted to You in all ways. Amen.

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; 2 Corinthians 8:13

This is in line with the previous verse which said -

"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."

Paul's logic is that when one gives, it should be according to what one has. However, in verse 3 he said this about those in Macedonia -

"For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability..."

He has shown that the Macedonians gave even beyond their ability, in a manner that would cause them to have to give up on their own necessities in order to assist those in Jerusalem. However, he explained that they did it freely and without being persuaded. Understanding this context, he now says, "For..." This is based on the preceding verse and his thought of giving out of what one has. He is not trying to persuade them to do what those in Macedonia had done willingly. Instead, he simply means that they should give in order to help those in need, but "not that others should be eased and you burdened."

Would it make sense that the gift to those in Jerusalem be so large that they could then live lavishly while the givers of the gift had to sacrifice? In that case, a collection from Jerusalem would be needed for the Gentiles who gave! It would make no sense. Paul is simply asking them to give in a manner by which none would become impoverished, but that all would be comforted. His next verses will explain this.

Life application: Sometimes in our zeal to give for a worthy cause, we may promise more than we actually intended to. In such a case, it is appropriate that we give according to the promise. We are to pay our vows. Think carefully about what you intend to do before you do it so that you don't later regret what you have done.

Glorious God Almighty, help me to be a generous but wise giver. Instill in me a heart which will gladly help others, but at the same time grant me wisdom to not be overzealous and then later regretful of the promises I make. I am sure that when I make a promise, I need to fulfill it. And so, keep me restrained in the things I say until I have thought them through carefully. This I pray so that I won't ever bring discredit upon Your name through bad choices. Amen.

...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.

2 Corinthians 8:14

The last words that Paul said concerned the state which existed between those in Corinth and those in Jerusalem. It was not Paul's intent that one party should be burdened while another party was eased. Instead, he now explains that he is looking for a state of equality. If equality exists, then neither is burdened. As the Corinthians were not in a state of need, as shown in the words "now at this time your abundance," they would be able to supply in the lack (the state of need) of those in Jerusalem.

Noting that this is appropriate, he further explains "that their abundance also may *supply* your lack." Although unstated, it may be that he was thinking on the lines of material blessings from one and spiritual blessings from the other. This idea is nicely stated in Romans 15 -

"It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things." Romans 15:27

As those in Jerusalem had supplied spiritual blessings to those in Corinth, it was only right that those in Corinth therefore supply material blessings to those in Jerusalem. Whether this is his thought, or whether he was looking forward to a time when the tables were turned and Corinth would be in material need cannot be stated with certainty, but Paul is giving a summary of what is right and proper between brothers when needs exist. He is writing in hopes "that there may be equality."

It is important to understand that he is writing about equality *within* the Christian community. He is not writing about global equality where the hard work of those who are diligent to get up and produce each day is robbed from them in order to pay for those who are indolent. He is also not writing about Christians being forced to pay for Muslims who have evil intent towards those who would help them. The state of today's

world, where leaders of both governments and religions are purposely robbing from Mike to pay for Manuel or Muhammed, is unbiblical and harmful to the proper functioning of a society.

Life application: Don't be fooled by pope or president that you have no right to what you have earned. Tell them to go earn their own money and pass that on to those they wish while you will be willing to help your Christian brothers or whoever else you feel it is appropriate to tend to.

Heavenly Father, help me to be good and kind towards my brothers who are in need. Let my heart be willing to help them when times are tough - both in a material and in a spiritual sense. When I have abundance, give me the desire to share in gifts which will ease their burdens and meet their needs according to Your wisdom and not my own. You have blessed me with ability, abundance, and spare time; let me not withhold these when my brothers are in need. Amen.

As it is written, “He who *gathered* much had nothing left over, and he who *gathered* little had no lack.” 2 Corinthians 8:15

Paul now cites Scripture to demonstrate that what has occurred among the early church was not unlike what occurred among the early redeemed congregation of Israel. Shortly after departing from Egypt, the Lord provided the people Manna for their sustenance. The account encompasses Exodus 16, but the portion which Paul cites is to be found in these verses -

And Moses said to them, “This *is* the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: ‘Let every man gather it according to each one’s need, one omer for each person, *according to the number of persons*; let every man take for *those who are* in his tent.’”

¹⁷ Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less. ¹⁸ So when they measured *it* by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one’s need. Exodus 16:15-18

The gathering of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem was a collection of love intended to meet their needs just as the Manna from the Lord was an act of love towards His people. The people went out and gathered each morning and brought it into the camp. When it was divided up between them, it was found that the exact amount needed for all of the people had been gathered.

In this, Paul is not demonstrating a socialist or communist attitude. Rather, he is citing the Scripture in order to show that what the people possessed ultimately came from God and it would be inappropriate for other brothers to lack while they had an overabundance. These verses cannot be used to justify government robbing of one group in order to pay for another.

First, this is a collection based on free-will giving. Secondly, it is intended only for Christians in need, not the society at large. Third, those in Corinth were not asked to sell any possessions or land in order to make contributions. They were asked to provide willingly out of whatever they possessed. Fourth, the account of the Manna in the wilderness ended when Israel came to the Land of Promise and a new economy was introduced.

Life application: If you hear a socialist or a commie use the Bible to justify their ungodly stand, ignore them. They are manipulators of God's word with evil intent. Tell them to get to work and earn their own keep.

Heavenly Father, I wish people would be as willing to read and know their Bible as they are to memorize sports statistics or play on the internet. If they were, we wouldn't have a social gospel or a society full of indolent people waiting for a handout. Nor would our leaders use the Bible to justify ungodly aims. I pray for a society that would return to Your word, cherish it, and live by it once again. I certainly pray for this. Amen.

But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.
2 Corinthians 8:16

Paul, always giving thanks where thanks is due, moves from his idea of Christian giving in order to relieve one another's burden, to the heartfelt care of Titus for those in Corinth. He thanks God for having directed Titus' heart in this way stating that He "puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus."

Some older translations say "put" as if it was something instilled in Titus in the past. This is not correct. The verb is in the present tense; it is an on-going action. God put, and continued to put, earnest care for those in Corinth into Titus' heart. This is important because it indicates that he still had that care for them, and he continued to be burdened for them as Paul wrote the letter which would then be carried by Titus back to them.

In arriving, they would read this verse and know that among them stood a person who had not only cared for them in the past, but who continued to do so. Paul makes no direct connection to himself here, but the thought is to be implicitly understood. Just as Paul cared about them, and just as he continued to care about them, so Titus also cared about them.

In context, it needs to be remembered that Paul is speaking of the gift which is being collected for the saints in Jerusalem. Therefore, the care which is being referred to includes the fact that the Corinthians had promised to make a gift and that this promise needed to be fulfilled. If not, then there would be a stain upon them and upon their name. Therefore, the care of Paul and Titus is that this would not occur, but rather that they would complete the task and receive thanks rather than disapproval.

Life application: If there is a need for God's people that He determines will be met, He will ensure that the need is met. It is He who stirs hearts and directs the events in such times. Be assured that He is overseeing His church in an absolutely perfect way. If things don't turn out as we may hope or expect, we shouldn't become disheartened because the Lord already figured the matter out in accord with His greater plan.

Lord, knowing that You are in control of all things sure takes the pressure off when times don't go well. Just because I may not understand why trials come, should I think that Your plan has failed? Not at all! Help me to remember this when things seem to be falling apart. Help me at those times to say, "God has it all under control... this was no surprise to Him." I am confident that there is a good plan which will not fail to come out exactly as You ordained. Thank You for this. Amen.

For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. 2 Corinthians 8:17

It needs to be noted that Paul hasn't yet finished the letter he is writing, and it has not yet been received or read by the Corinthians. And yet, he is writing as if the thing mentioned is accomplished by using the words "accepted" and "went." This is known as an epistolary aorist. His words are intended to reflect the state of things as the letter is read, and thus his thoughts encompass what has not yet transpired.

In this, he says that Titus "not only accepted the exhortation..." This indicates that Paul had put forth the idea that Titus would be the one to return to Corinth with the letter. Titus heard Paul's words and responded to them, but there was more. He now says, "...but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord."

It is as if Titus heard Paul and then said, "I had already planned on going!" This explains the words of the previous verse which said, "...thanks *be* to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus." He wasn't just willing to go because he was asked. Instead, he was willing to go because his heart was turned towards the Corinthians in brotherly love.

The words in this verse then are intended to show the church at Corinth that Titus was both sanctioned by Paul and that he was already willing and eager to go. It is a touching note concerning Titus' zeal for the church there.

Life application: If someone is willing to accomplish a task for you or for your church, it is good to send along a note of approval which can say, "I vouch for the sincerity of this person. He wanted to help and I fully support him in this matter." In doing so, it may be just what is needed to ensure that the person is accepted by those he is going to visit.

Lord, a fish needs water to swim in, and there is water. Squirrels need acorns to eat, and You provide them in abundance. Trees need soil to cling to and grow, and it is there for them. Every need which is instilled in life has something which can fulfill it. Me... I have a need for You. It permeates my very soul, calling out for You. This need exists and You are there to fulfill it. Thank You for Your presence in my life. I am filled to overflowing. Amen.

And we have sent with him the brother whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches, ... 2 Corinthians 8:18

Again, Paul writes in the epistolary aorist style, stating that "we have sent" even though he is still writing the letter. When they receive the letter, they will also have with them "the brother whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches." It is rather unusual that the brother is not named. Paul seems to rejoice over giving credit, right in his letters, for those who are willing to work for the sake of the gospel.

Scholars debate who this person is and the majority of them turn to Luke as the most likely. Others have suggested Titus' brother, Silas, Barnabas, Mark, and Epaenetus. Some of those have been adamantly excluded by other scholars. In reasoning why Luke is the correct choice, long notes of explanation are given. None of these names can be ascertained with certainty and some of them make dubious connections.

One reason for selecting Luke is the phrase "in the gospel." As he was the author of one of the four gospels, the connection is made that he is being spoken of. But it is also generally understood that at this point, the term "gospel" did not refer to the written

accounts we now call the "four gospels." Instead, it was a term speaking of the general plan of salvation spoken by those who spread it.

Vincent's Word Studies gives an impressive possibility for who is being referred to. They base it on "a supposed play upon the word praise, epainos; Epaenetus meaning praiseworthy." Paul makes use of the same type of wordplay in the book of Philemon where Onesimus is called "profitable" which is exactly what his name means. This is seen in Philemon 1:10, 11 -

"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains,
¹¹ who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me."

Whoever it was that Paul sent along with Titus, he was a proper choice because of his praise "in the gospel" which permeated all the churches.

Life application: There are various mysteries in the Bible which can only be speculated on, but these also can help us to stretch our minds and possibly make other conclusions that may never have been made. It is good to not be overly zealous in defending that which cannot be defended, but there is nothing wrong with doing our best to try to explain these hidden mysteries.

Lord God, I know that I will stand before You in judgment someday. It is my goal to be prepared for that day. I can only think that a Christian life that is lived without wanting to know Your word more and more each day is a life which has wasted what is of the highest value. We can't know Your heart without knowing Your word. We can't grasp who Jesus truly is without it either. And we can't know You if we don't know these things. Grant me a heart to place Your word where it truly belongs - high on my list of daily duties. Help me to know Your superior word. Amen.

What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. 2 Corinthians 8:19

This verse explains more about "the brother who is praised by all the churches" mentioned in the preceding verse. This brother "was chosen by the churches." The word for choosing him is *cheirotoneó*. It specifically means "election by a show of hands" or "chosen by a vote." It is only used one other time, in Acts 14:23, in the selection of elders in churches. This brother wasn't only praised by all the churches, but he was also trusted by them as well.

Paul notes that his selection was "to accompany us as we carry the offering." He was doing everything possible to ensure that the offering was not only collected without pressure, but also to make sure that it would be supervised and safeguarded by a group of people who could ensure there was integrity concerning its handling every step of the way.

It needs to be remembered that he is still in the process of stirring the Corinthians into action concerning their promise of giving. His words concerning this person are probably twofold then. First, they would not have to worry if the gift could be mishandled in any way because of how it was being collected and conducted to Jerusalem. Secondly, this designated representative, and in fact all involved in the process, would be aware of exactly how much was given by each church. If they didn't meet what they promised, it would reflect negatively on them as a body.

As Paul continues, he says that the offering is one that "we administer in order to honor the Lord." This "we" is all-inclusive of every person and each church involved in the gathering. Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles, and those he ministered to were the fruit of his labors. They were mostly Gentiles who were tending to the needs of the saints in Jerusalem. Could there be a better way to "honor the Lord" than to meet the needs of those who were there, even during His earthly ministry and who were now in need? Thus in giving, they would be able to "show our eagerness to help."

Life application: There are those who are older within the church. They may not be able to attend anymore because of an infirmity. Wouldn't it be honoring to the Lord for us to make visits to them in gratitude for their service to the church during their own youth? If we can remember that we meet because of their faithfulness, then it should put our visits and care for them in the proper perspective. Each time we gather, it is partly a result of their commitment to the very place where we meet.

Heavenly Father, please help us to remember those who can no longer attend the church because of age or infirmity. Give us the willing heart to stop by and visit from time to time and to share in how things are at the church they helped to maintain during their own youth. Thank You for their past faithfulness, and please help us to be equally faithful to them now. I know this would certainly be honoring to You. Amen.

...avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us— 2 Corinthians 8:20

This verse explains why the person is going along with Titus "who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift." It was Paul's explicit intent to avoid any hint of impropriety in the giving of this gift. The word for "avoiding this" is *stelló*. It is described by Vincent's Word Studies -

"The verb, which occurs only here and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, means to arrange or provide for. As preparation involves a getting together of things, it passes into the meaning of collect, gather: then contract, as the furling of sails; so, to draw back, draw one's self away."

Paul used this particular word to show that he wanted to avoid even the smallest hint that he or anyone else would dream of misusing what had been so faithfully entrusted into their care. The thing he most wanted to do in this was to avoid the chance that "anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us."

The word translated as "lavish gift" is a word unique to the New Testament, *hadrotés*. It comes from *hadros* meaning "plumpness." It then gives the idea of lavish generosity. What had already been prepared by those in Macedonia, and what was hoped for from those in Corinth, was to be a sizeable amount. Paul wanted everything concerning its handling to be done with the greatest care.

But Paul's word concerning the "lavish gift" may also be used to continue to encourage the Corinthians on to greater giving. Remember that he has not yet received anything but a promise from them. Now he is mentally preparing them for fulfilling that promise.

Life application: Gifts to a church or ministry must be handled with the highest care. Any hint of impropriety will cause those not in the church to question Christian honesty. Those in the church may become disheartened and even walk away from the fellowship as well. Pray that those who receive from you will be scrupulous in how they handle what they have received.

Lord, if You endured the cross for a sinner like me, then surely I can endure hardships and difficulties for the sake of Your name when I interact with others. Help me to forgive easily, be careful in my words of counsel, and to act uprightly in my actions towards others. Help me Lord to be a person who will bring credit and honor to Your wonderful name. Amen.

...providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. 2 Corinthians 8:21

Paul's words here are also reflected in Romans 12:17 –

"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men."

Together, they find their source in the Greek translation of Proverbs 3:4 -

"*And* so find favor and high esteem
In the sight of God and man."

Paul knew his own conscience, and he was fully aware that God knew it as well. As he said in 2 Corinthians 5:11, "...we are well known to God." He could easily have collected all of the money, put it in a traveling bag, and headed to Jerusalem without any notion of taking a penny for himself. Upon arrival, he would have presented it to the saints there with a clear conscience within himself and before the Lord.

However, he was not the only person who was involved in the process. There were the many who gave, and there were those who would receive. If even one person had ill thoughts about how Paul would handle such a gift, then it would taint the entire process. Suppose he was robbed during the journey. Would those who had so faithfully given believe his story? Questions would surely arise in their minds as to what "really" happened to this immense gift.

And so, it was his intent to always be "providing honorable things." It is a lesson each one of us should carry with us at all times. Others are evaluating us, even if we have a clear conscience towards God. For a list of other verses which carry this or a similar idea by Paul, you can refer to Romans 14:6; 2 Corinthians 6:3, 1 Timothy 5:14; 1 Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:8.

Life application: If we believe that God is watching us and will hold us accountable for our actions, and if we actually care that this will occur, then we will tend to act in a morally proper manner. But those around us cannot get inside our heads and discern what God can. Therefore, it is right that our external actions are guided by safeguarding principles which will keep others from making unfounded, negative deductions about our actions.

Heavenly Father, as followers of the Lord, help us to remember that even if our hearts are directed to You and our consciences are clear in dealings with others, that they don't know us as You do. And so, help our actions to be appropriate in all ways and at all times

so that they will never be misinterpreted. Help us to be regarded as upright by men so that Your name will be exalted when we speak of You. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 8:22

Again, we have an unnamed brother who is being sent along with Titus and the other unnamed brother of verse 18. It is impossible to definitively identify who this is. The long list of those who have been named by past scholars shows the futility of being dogmatic about it. Some suggested names have been Tychicus, Apollos, Silas, Timothy, Trophimus, Clement, Epaenetus, Luke, Zenas, and Sosthenes. Maybe others have been named as well, but this long list shows that it really could be one of a number of people.

Regardless of who it is, he "often proved diligent in many things." As he was known for this, he would certainly be a good choice for such a delicate mission. And he certainly wanted to go as well. The note that he was "now much more diligent" shows that he was actually excited about the challenge and was ready to get on with it. And the reason for his diligence was "because of the great confidence which we have in you."

The confidence of Paul and the others concerning the Corinthians to step up and fulfill the promise they previously made spurred this brother on to joining in the task. He was ready to travel there and then all the way to Jerusalem, carrying this precious gift to the saints in need.

In this verse are two of only three times that the word *spoudaios*, or diligent, is used in the Bible. The other use was in verse 17. Charles Ellicott notes that, "It implies what we might almost call the 'business-like' side of the Christian type of character, and is therefore employed with special fitness here."

Life application: Some people's names are left out of the biblical record, and yet they have had a great impact on what occurred in the narrative. The words about them are also inspiring and praiseworthy. If you are doing a service for the Lord and yet have been unnamed and not recognized, don't be disheartened. The same Lord who withheld the names of these faithful people from His superior word knows everything you have done and are doing for Him.

Lord God, there are many people recorded for their notable deeds in the Bible, and yet their names are left out. You allowed them to remain hidden in obscurity, but showed us

the great things they did at the same time. May this be an encouragement to anyone who is doing quiet deeds behind the scenes for You. Help them to understand that You know who they are, and that You are aware of each thing they do. Thank You Lord for such diligent people! Yes, please honor them openly at Your judgment seat. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 8:23

The words "anyone inquires" are inserted by the translators and they may or may not convey the proper sense of what is being intended. In Greek, the idea here could more clearly be stated "As to Titus" or "Regarding Titus." In other words, as there were factions at Corinth (which is addressed in detail in 1 Corinthians), some of the church might question Titus' authority to conduct the affairs that he will carry on. It also could be that Paul had heaped such praise upon the others that are going with Titus (as noted in verses 18 and 22), that he felt it was necessary to also show that Titus has the same level of approval and is just as trustworthy as he noted they are.

And so, to bolster Titus in the eyes of those in Corinth, he says that "*he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you.*" As a "partner," Titus is placed on an equal footing with Paul at least in the labors which they conduct. As a "fellow worker," Titus is shown to have the same end goal for the labors with which they labored. They are, in essence, a harmonious team concerning the church in Corinth.

Continuing on, he says, "*Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.*" If questions were to arise concerning the other brethren, Paul lets them know that they are speaking on behalf of the churches and are not working independently of them.

The word here for "messengers" is from the Greek word meaning "apostles." In this case, it is used in the non-technical sense of "delegates." As there is no article in front of the word "apostles," it indicates that they are not of the chosen "apostles" who are delegates of Christ, but are rather "apostles" in the lower sense of those who are "delegates for the churches."

Paul's final words, "the glory of Christ," show that these men had such favorable reputations, and were to be considered so trustworthy, that they actually displayed in themselves the glory of Christ. They brought such honor to the churches that they reflected His glory in every way.

Life application: As Paul has shown consistently in his words, it is right and proper to acknowledge those who minister on behalf of others, not just in words of praise, but in words of trust. We can say, "This person is a really nice guy," and yet not tell the entire story that needs to be told. By adding in, "This person can be fully trusted," they are elevated to an entirely new level in the eyes of the recipients of those words. Be ready to support those who have shown themselves faithful in this way.

Heavenly Father, glorious God - I am so thankful for those who have been placed in my path of life who have had such a strong and positive influence over me. It would be impossible to remember them all, but You know who they are and how they have molded and guided me in ways either little or great, but which have brought me to where I am as a person. Thank You for the path of life You have placed me on which has included these wonderful souls. Praise You for Your guiding hand of care in my life. Amen.

Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf. 2 Corinthians 8:24

Paul finishes this chapter with his appeal to the Corinthians to put their words into action. He begins with "therefore." This actually covers the entire discourse on the matter to this point as he weaves together his words for them to consider.

His words, "show to them" are speaking specifically of Titus and the other two who will be coming to them for the very purpose of gathering up the gift that had been promised by the Corinthians. Next, he says, "...and before the churches" which probably is referring specifically to the Macedonian churches he has mentioned in detail during this chapter. This would include Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica. It may also include other churches that Paul had boasted to concerning the promised gift from those in Corinth.

In these two separate appeals, it is clearly evident that Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to save themselves from an embarrassing situation. If their actions didn't meet their words, there would only be a sense of dishonor concerning them in the eyes of those who gave so willingly, even out of their poverty. In order for this not to happen, he mentions to them that this gift would show "the proof of your love."

This thought takes us back to verse 8 which said -

"I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others." 2 Corinthians 8:8

Verse 8 was placed between the verses concerning the Macedonians and the verse concerning what Christ did in the giving of Himself. These were diligent in proving their love through action. Now it was the Corinthian's chance to do the same. Along with that, there was the matter which was "our boasting on your behalf."

They had spoken, Paul and the others had accepted their words at face value, and boasting of what was coming from them went out. In the case of boasting to Titus, it was something that would now become either proven true or proven false. If false, he would be embarrassed to return with such a paltry gift. His boasting to Titus is recorded in verse 7:14.

In his boasting to the Macedonians, it led to their giving in an immense way. If his words proved false, then those in Macedonia would naturally feel used and hurt. This boasting to the Macedonians was mentioned in verse 8:2.

Life application: We use the term, "This is where the rubber meets the road" to indicate that specific moment when something which should happen actually comes about. If it doesn't, then there will be negative consequences. In the case of a car, it may lose traction, or it may stall out. Either way, disaster could result. When we make promises, they are only realized when the rubber meets the road. And so let us have plenty of tread on our tires as we fulfill what we have spoken with our lips.

Lord God, if I were a tire, would I have plenty of tread for the road set before me? I make promises, and I need to keep them. I set goals, and I need to attain them. I have a race set before me, and I need to reach the finish line. Help me to be an untiring tire - one which is grounded on the path of my commitment, and which avoids the potholes, sharp objects, and unseen black ice which could drive me off my course. Eyes on Jesus! The road is marked out! Be with me on this track of life. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;
2 Corinthians 9:1

Paul, after having brought up the subject of Titus and his traveling companions, returns to the subject of the collection of the gift which he had been speaking of. His words, "Now concerning the ministering to the saints," are speaking of this very thing. "The saints" are those saints in Jerusalem who are in need.

Concerning this gift, he says that "it is superfluous for me to write to you." He is tactfully avoiding a possibility of hurting their feelings by directly reminding them of their obligation. Instead, the word "superfluous" is used to let them feel that he knows they have committed to give and will also fulfill in the collection of the gift. Should he not say that his words were superfluous, they may feel he doubted their intent to fulfill the promise previously made.

This will become evident in the next verse. Paul is masterfully writing to them to remind them of what they have promised, and yet he is claiming that no reminder is necessary. He understands this type of approach is both wise and necessary. The promise has faded in the minds of the Corinthians, and he is bringing it back to a prominent place now that the time for the collection has arrived.

Life application: To make a vow and not fulfill it is to lie concerning the vow. Lying is not just a command found in the Law of Moses which has now been set aside in Christ. Lying is forbidden in the New Testament as well (see Colossians 3:9 for example). Think your words through carefully at all times and be sure to perform what your lips have spoken, if you cannot, then be sure to fully explain to the one whom you have made the promise to why you must retract your words.

Lord Jesus, help us to speak the truth, to perform the vows which we have spoken, and to be seen as people of integrity so that You will not be diminished in the eyes of those who evaluate You based on what we say and do. Grant us discernment in how we present ourselves and in the words we speak to others. In the end, what they see in us is how they will then evaluate You. May our conduct and integrity lead many to You. Amen.

...for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.
2 Corinthians 9:2

Continuing with his thoughts on the gathering and final collection of the gift from those in Corinth, Paul says first that "I know your willingness." He was there personally and had heard the words of promise which the Corinthians had made, their desire to give, and the excitement about doing so. Because of this, when he was in Macedonia, he boasted on behalf of those in Corinth concerning their zeal.

His words, "...about which I boast of you" are in the present tense and it shows that he was still in Macedonia and still making the boast to inspire them on in their giving as well. It is likely that this letter is being written from Philippi. The boast of which he speaks is found in verse 24 of the previous chapter. It is a boast which Paul is praying is still applicable, hoping that their zeal has not died down.

Of interest is that he says, "Achaia was ready a year ago." His words to those in Macedonia show that those in Achaia had already begun preparing for this gift. In his first epistle, he even gave instructions on how best to do it -

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ² On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. ³ And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me." 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

The term "Achaia" encompasses the region of Greece where Corinth was the capital. Therefore, this is indicating that there were more churches than just the one in Corinth that had promised to give. Romans 16:1 shows that there was a church in Cenchrea. Paul's boasting included any and all of the churches, of which Corinth would have been the most prominent.

Because of this boasting, he notes that "your zeal has stirred up the majority." It would be a shame if the boast proved to be unfounded. As a way of hinting at this, the word for "stirred up" is used in a good sense. In essence, it means "to motivate." However, it could be used in a negative sense, such as in Colossians 3:21 -

"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."

As the word could go either way, he is probably using it to show that at this time their zeal had a positive effect. However, if they were to delay further, or fail to come through, with their promise, it would turn from a happy stirring to a negative one.

Life application: Delaying a promise can turn into an unhappy thing. We should keep from making promises that we cannot fulfill, or we should explain that the promise will be fulfilled by a certain time. Don't let things fester in the heart of the one who received the promise.

Lord Jesus, Your word promised salvation for those who would reach out to You, and in due time You came and fulfilled Your word. You didn't shy back from what was necessary in order to fulfill what You had said. Help me to be like that also. Help me to keep my promises and to not let others down with words that only tickle the ears, but which fail to follow through on my promises. Amen.

Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; 2 Corinthians 9:3

Paul begins this verse with the word "yet." This is a subtle hint of what he will say next. He had just mentioned his boasting concerning the church at Corinth to the Macedonians, telling them about the zeal he witnessed there in regards to the gift. Despite this zeal, he felt it prudent to ensure follow up to the promise by saying, "I have sent the brethren."

These are Titus and the two other unnamed brothers mentioned in verses 8:22, 23. The intent, at least in part, is to avoid the personal embarrassment of Paul as well as of those in Corinth. It was his plan that the gift's presentation would not fall short of the promise "lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect."

We can imagine the embarrassed stares all around should those in Corinth not provide as he had said they would. Each party would have secret thoughts of being duped or of having failed in their commitment. In the end, nobody would be left untouched by the failure. Because of this, he was doing his very best to ensure that those in Corinth would "be ready."

Life application: Which is more embarrassing - to fail to meet a promise or to be the one who reminds the person of the promise they made? Both can be cumbersome and difficult, but if a promise is made which will affect numerous parties, it is certainly best to ensure that the promise is fulfilled. In such a case, we can come to this passage in 2 Corinthians and see how Paul has handled this very delicate matter.

Heavenly Father, it is amazing how many real-life applications can be found right in Your word. Countless situations occur which lead us to a better understanding of how to deal

with similar matters which arise in our own lives. And why is this? It is because You are the One who fashioned us in the first place! You know exactly what is needed in all situations and so You've given us a guide for these times. Thank You for Your precious word! Amen.

...lest if *some* Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. 2 Corinthians 9:4

Paul continues the thought of the previous verse concerning his boasting in what the Corinthians were going to do in their gift giving. The term "Macedonians" leaves off any article and therefore it is as if Paul is conducting a competition between the two groups of people - pitting them against one another to spur them on to the greatest gift possible.

Charles Ellicott and others think that this may mean that the two unnamed brothers of chapter 8 are Macedonians. Thus, they would be able to report on this competition between the two. However, if they are coming with Titus, who is carrying Paul's letter, then this doesn't fit. Paul will only travel to Corinth after the letter is received. It is whoever travels with Paul, not with Titus, who is being referred to. As he says, they were to come with him. When they traveled together, he didn't want them to find those in Corinth "unprepared."

Paul will be traveling with Macedonians who will be evaluating the words he spoke to them. If the gift at Corinth didn't match his boasting, it would be embarrassing. This is exactly what he has been trying to avoid. This would be particularly so with the Corinthians who had done the boasting. In order to get them on the ball he says, "...not to mention you!"

Together, all parties would find some sort of shame in the events which had transpired. The words "confident boasting" indicate that which is below something else, like a foundation, or the ground. It is what provides stability and steadfastness. If the gift wasn't ready, the sure words of those in Corinth, and the boasting of Paul concerning them, would seem as if they lacked any true foundation.

Life application: Words without a firm foundation and something to back them up are just wasted breath. Be sure to follow up on what you speak (as Paul is doing in this letter) to ensure that your words are found true and reliable.

Lord God, how often do our words lack any true foundation! And when this is so, people feel they cannot trust us in the future. Help us to be people of truth, honesty, and integrity. Help us to never bring shame upon Your name by being anything less than the epitome of integrity. May those who are called by the Lord act as if it is true! To Your glory I pray this. Amen.

Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which *you had* previously promised, that it may be ready as *a matter of* generosity and not as a grudging obligation.

2 Corinthians 9:5

In this verse, Paul uses the idea of "before" three times - "go to you ahead of time;" "your generous gift beforehand;" and "previously promised." This triple repetition demonstrates that he was considerably involved in this process in order to avoid any hint that he had embellished his words to the Macedonians, or that he could not trust the previous promises of the Corinthians. His intent was to have everything ready before those from Macedonia arrived. Should they find things were not as promised, everyone involved in the process would have some sort of bad feelings towards the collection of this gift.

For this reason, Paul "thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time." Actually, Titus was more than willing to go, even eager. But Paul also wanted the others to go with him to ensure that everything was handled in a proper manner. This is obviously a large gift and so more than one delegate was proper.

His sending of them then was to "prepare your generous gift beforehand." As noted, having it ready before his arrival with the Macedonians was of the highest importance to him. His stress in this verse cannot be underestimated, especially with the next words "which *you had* previously promised." They had spoken in promise and Paul was reminding them of this. If this were not true, then he could not have written that they had promised. And so, his words are a reminder to them of this.

Having said that, the reminder is necessary because of his final words which say, "...that it may be ready as a *matter of* generosity and not as a grudging obligation." Should he arrive and the gift not be ready, he could rightly state in front of all of the visiting guests, "You promised this gift and others were motivated by your promise. Now you are reneging on the very promise which prompted them to give, even beyond their means." Should he speak in such a manner, they would be shamed into giving out of "grudging

obligation." When he and the money departed for Jerusalem, there would be shame rather than honor left behind for them to wallow in.

The specificity in this verse is a clear and evident indication of Paul's true heart for every part of the process to be smooth, honorable, and edifying for all involved.

Life application: Hindsight is 20/20, but with careful thought and contemplation, it is not always necessary to say, "Oh I wish I had...." Instead, by taking the time to think important issues through, pitfalls can be avoided through tact and diplomacy.

Lord God, give us the ability to look forward through difficult issues and to properly evaluate the best way of handling them in advance. Help us to be people that don't just run into situations without thought or care, but to ask ourselves what is the most honorable and proper way to handle them. Grant us this that we might avoid bringing trouble to ourselves and having a negative view of You arise in the eyes of others. Amen.

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 2 Corinthians 9:6

This verse closely matches Galatians 6:7, 8 -

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

However, there are marked differences in the intent behind the two as well. In this verse, Paul gives a push for graciously abundant giving. It is a thought which builds upon the entire discourse concerning giving. Not only were they to not give grudgingly (verse 5), but they should give in an exceptional way.

In explanation then, he says, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly." Sowing is when one puts seed in the ground in the planting of crops. If someone puts a handful of grain into the ground on a large field, they won't be reaping very much at harvest time. However, if one takes the chance, sows a large amount of grain (which could be otherwise eaten or sold for money), and tends to the field, they will probably have a far different result. As noted, "He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

John Chrysostom says, "He calls it sowing in order that we may learn by the figure of the harvest that in giving we receive more than we give." This is generally true. There is, of

course, no guarantee that a field will yield a thing. Drought, infestations, etc., may destroy the entire crop. But one cannot reap bountifully unless they first sow bountifully. And the word translated here as "bountifully" literally means "with blessings."

In this, we can see that there is more than just a material reaping at the harvest. There is also the satisfaction which accompanies the reaping. Blessings come to us in that which we find satisfaction. A person may simply be blessed by working in the cool breeze under the blue sky. But unless one goes out to reap, this part of the blessing will be missed.

However, the general principle here is a return on an investment by an increase of the same thing which was invested. A couple proverbs follow this same broad thought -

"There is *one* who scatters, yet increases more;
And there is *one* who withholds more than is right,
But it *leads* to poverty.
²⁵ The generous soul will be made rich,
And he who waters will also be watered himself." Proverbs 11:24, 25

"He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD,
And He will pay back what he has given." Proverbs 18:11

Without taking this to an unintended extreme, which modern "word of faith" preachers do, this is a general principle of increase. If a preacher promises that you will reap a hundredfold if you send him \$100.00, don't waste your time. God is not a cosmic ATM. He tends to our needs, and He rewards each of us according to His wisdom, not our greed.

Further, it needs to be remembered that "sowing bountifully" is something that can only be determined by the individual in relation to what they already possess. If a millionaire sows \$500.00, it really isn't that much. In fact, it would be nothing compared to a cash-strapped blue-collar worker who gave the same amount. Just because it is the same amount, the proportion is one which can't truly be compared. To Proverbs again -

"He who has a generous eye will be blessed,
For he gives of his bread to the poor." Proverbs 22:9

Life application: You cannot reap unless you sow. One cannot reap a great amount unless they sow enough to produce a great amount. This general principle applies in giving. All will be rewarded for their faithful sowing, but some of that reaping may not be realized in this life. If you're giving in order to receive, you have missed the joy of giving and the reward may not be what you had hoped for.

Heavenly Father, Your word tells us that he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. However, this is often taken to unintended places by people who want to get rich off of the giving of others. Help us to give with an open hand, to anticipate blessings from You for giving done in faith, and yet to understand that You are not a cosmic ATM. Instead, You will reward us according to Your wisdom and not towards our misguided wants. Thank You for every blessing that comes from Your open hand of grace. Amen.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7

The law is fulfilled in Christ, and it is annulled. There is no longer a requirement to tithe in the New Testament Church. Not only that, this verse is the most explicit one in all of Paul's writings concerning what to give and when. Only Galatians 6:6 adds anything substantially more for us to follow -

"Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches."

Understanding this, we should take this verse to heart and carry it with us always. New Testament Christians are to "each one give as he purposes in his heart." That is it. We are not to allow ourselves to be forced to tithe by a pastor who reinserts the law which is now done away with. (Run, don't walk from there!) We are also not to be coerced into giving apart from how our heart directs us, willingly and freely.

The word for "purposes" is *proaireó*. This is its only use in the New Testament and it "is used in its full ethical significance as indicating, not a passing impulse nor a vague wish, but a deliberate resolve, deciding both on the end and on the means for its attainment" (Charles Ellicott).

When we give, it is not to be as a passing fancy, under feelings of compulsion, nor in a manner which will later be stewed over. Instead, we are to give willingly, freely, and with a heart that is content that giving the gift was the right thing to do.

Paul continues in his thought by saying, "...not grudgingly or of necessity." The Greek word for "grudgingly" literally means "from grief" or "out of sorrow." Rather than being coerced into parting with our money and later feeling remorse over having given, we are to be joyous that we have helped out in a way which blessed us while also blessing the recipient of the gift. It should be voluntary rather than out of necessity as well. If we give out of necessity, then it is less a gift and more of a need.

Paul finishes this marvelous verse with the words, "...for God loves a cheerful giver." Again, he introduces a word here that is only used this one time in the New Testament, *hilaros*, or "cheerful." Our giving should be such that we are actually happy when we part with the money. We should be able to say, "I worked XX hours to make that, and I am so pleased that those hours were spent in order to give this gift."

The verse we are looking at closely follows the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) from Proverbs 22. The Hebrew version reads -

"He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow,
And the rod of his anger will fail.
⁹ He who has a generous eye will be blessed,
For he gives of his bread to the poor." Proverbs 22:8, 9

The Hebrew version cited here is close enough to get a resemblance of Paul's words, but it is clear from him citing Proverbs elsewhere in this letter that he had recently been reading that book and it was fresh on his mind. Further, it is apparent that he had been reading not the Hebrew version, but the Greek version. Finally, as a point that this type of giving was even considered appropriate in the Old Testament, we read this from Exodus 25 -

"Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering." Exodus 25:2

Understanding that this offering was taken voluntarily from the people of Israel, and that it was intended for the building of the tabernacle, it follows that our gifts for the building of the church should likewise be voluntary, not forced. Again, this precept is found in the building of Solomon's temple as well -

"Then the leaders of the fathers' *houses*, leaders of the tribes of Israel, the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the officers over the king's work, offered willingly. ⁷ They gave for the work of the house of God five thousand

talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. ⁸ And whoever had *precious* stones gave *them* to the treasury of the house of the LORD, into the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite. ⁹ Then the people rejoiced, for they had offered willingly, because with a loyal heart they had offered willingly to the LORD; and King David also rejoiced greatly." 1 Chronicles 29:6-9

This is the type of giving that is looked for in the New Testament believer. Let us take this to heart and not let the law be reinserted by mandating tithing, nor allow ourselves to be compelled to give against our will.

Life application: Take time today to memorize this verse and Galatians 6:6. After that, follow through with your giving in accord with those verses.

Heavenly Father, it sure is good to know that You trust the people of Your church enough to allow them to give freely and without compulsion. Thank You that we have no set limits on what we are to give or when we are to give it. Instead, You allow our gifts to come from our willing heart. Help us then because of this to be cheerful givers that are willing to meet the needs that arise and to feel satisfied in our hearts when we have done so! Thank You for hearing our prayer today. Amen.

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.

2 Corinthians 9:8

This verse explains verse 6 which said that "he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." However, it is also qualified by verse 7 which said that we should give as our heart purposes and not grudgingly or of necessity. If we give in the right spirit and in a way which is intended to glorify Him, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you."

This means that all good things that are necessary to fill up any void made from our giving will in fact be provided. There will be no lack. It is a note of assurance that people are not made poor by being generous. Instead, they will always have "all sufficiency in all things."

The word translated as "sufficiency" is only found here and in 1 Timothy 6:6. In that verse, Paul notes that "godliness with contentment is great gain." Our sufficiency will

ensure our contentment. But again, in that verse, Paul notes godliness. These verses of Paul cannot be separated from a connection to God.

The person who gives with the expectancy that they will profit from their giving is deluded. Giving is not intended to increase worldly wealth. Instead, it is intended to provide contentment in what one receives from the Lord, which will always provide all sufficiency. So much so is this, that Paul says they "may have an abundance for every good work."

There will never be a lack for the intended good work which is on one's heart. Rather, God will provide a suitable amount to ensure that the need is met. These words are promises and therefore we are being asked to trust that they are true when we give. But remember the key points. We are to give - 1) willingly, and 2) with a heart which acknowledges the Lord in our giving. If our giving is self-directed, why would the Lord reward that?

Life application: Name it and claim it preachers should be ignored. Sow it and grow it preachers should be ignored. These people will get rich at your expense. They have appealed to the greed of your own heart. Ignore them! Focus on the Lord, not yourselves when you give.

Lord Jesus, I am truly embarrassed by the "sow it and you will grow it" attitude within Your church. People give because they are told You will respond by giving them more. They look at You as a cosmic ATM - "Put in \$20 and you will get \$200 back." If that is all that there is to this type of faith, then they have their eyes in the wrong place. Help us to give willingly and with a pure heart. Help us to look to the true and undefiled riches which can never perish. Amen.

As it is written:

"He has dispersed abroad,

He has given to the poor;

His righteousness endures forever." 2 Corinthians 9:9

Paul returns to Scripture to make his point concerning his words of verses 6-8, but particularly verse 6. Here we find a quote from Psalm 112:9. Psalm 112 reviews the blessed status of a righteous man, and thus the words there show the cause and effect of his righteousness. In this portion of the psalm, it notes that "He has dispersed abroad." The idea is that of a farmer sowing seed. He carefully scatters his seed, tending to where each one falls in order to bring about a harvest.

When a righteous man gives, it is with a sense of care and purpose, not in a willy-nilly manner. But this doesn't just mean to people or places that will in turn directly bless him. Rather he has even "given to the poor." His open hand of seed is careful to ensure that those who could never repay him are the recipients of his kind heart. This follows through with verse 7 which said that each should give as he "purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."

Such a man will reap a great harvest, not necessarily in more money, but in an eternal and blessed state. As the psalmist says, "His righteousness endures forever." The only way this could come about is by having been blessed with eternal life. The fruit of sowing in this life is that of an eternal harvest. Such is the blessed state of a righteous man.

It should be noted though that deeds of righteousness are not in and of themselves meriting of heaven. Only a person who is in Christ will have those deeds counted towards his eternal state. The greatest giver on earth cannot buy heaven through his charity. Only through Christ can eternal life be attained.

Life application: God is aware of every seed you have sown, and He will reward you for those that were done in faith. Don't worry if no one sees your good deeds here on earth. God in heaven does and He is pleased with them.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the opportunity You have given to us to be charitable to others. If we have, it is because it all came from You. If we hoard away our treasure, it truly serves no purpose. Thieves can steal it, the government will certainly do their best to take it, and when we die, it will go to one who did not earn it. And so, give us the right sense to pass on what we can to others in need. Help us to use the time we have, the things we possess, and the abilities You have blessed us with in a way which will return honor to You. Amen.

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,
2 Corinthians 9:10

In accord with verses 6-9, Paul now pronounces a hopeful blessing upon the promised seed which the Corinthians intend to sow. As they give, Paul desires that they will also receive a harvest in return. "Now may He" is obviously speaking of the Lord who is the Source of all things. It is "He who supplies seed to the sower."

The word for "supplies" here is *epichorégeó* and it is used for the first time in Scripture. Charles Ellicott notes its unusual history -

"Originally it expressed the act of one who undertook to defray the expenses of the chorus of a Greek theatre. As this was an act of somewhat stately generosity, the verb got a wider range, and was applied to any such act, and was so transferred in like manner by the Apostle, probably, as far as we can trace, for the first time, to the divine bounty."

Paul, leaning on his understanding of the Greek cultures and traditions, uses this word in a new sense as he ascribes the supplying he speaks of directly to the Creator, from whom all things originally stem. He will use the word two more times in his epistles and Peter will pick it up from him and use it twice as well.

The phrase "seed to the sower" finds its roots in Isaiah. There he wrote -

"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
¹¹ So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:10, 11

In addition to such seed, it is the Lord who provides "bread for food." The seed grows, it is harvested and then it is turned into bread to feed man. Paul asks that such a blessing of prosperity from a seed, even to a full stomach, come upon the Corinthians with the petition that the Lord "supply and multiply the seed you have *sown*." They have pronounced that they would give a gift and Paul writes as if the gift has already been collected. In turn for their (promised) faithfulness, his words beg for a return blessing upon them.

However, the final words show that the return is not just a return of the same type which was sown. They are to invest money, but Paul asks that the Lord will "increase the fruits of your righteousness." The words come from the Greek translation of Hosea 10:12 and indicate spiritual blessings. It is the fruits of the righteousness and not

necessarily the fruits of the seed that will be increased. Paul then is referring as much to heavenly rewards as he is referring to an earthly return on their investment.

It would be inappropriate to think that by giving money that a sudden shower of money would come flooding back down on them. Rather, the rewards may come in this life, or they may come at the time of our meeting with Christ at the judgment seat. But either way, they will come. The Lord will reward all faithful sowing.

Life application: When you give, do so with an open hand and without attaching conditions upon the gift. If you give in hopes of receiving back, then you have given with the wrong intention. Be content to share what you have. The Lord will reward you in His own way and in His own time.

Lord, help my heart to be right before You, not looking for something in return for the good things I do for others. Instead, help me to be open-handed to others without expecting to profit off of my deeds. I know that You will reward me according to Your wisdom and in Your timing. Let my heart simply be glad to help others, knowing that it is the right thing to do. Amen.

...while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. 2 Corinthians 9:11

These words are connected in thought to the previous verse. Taken together, they read-

"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,¹¹ while *you are* enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God."

Paul noted the multiplication of the seed in order to "increase the fruits of your righteousness." This meant that what they earned would be sufficient to be spread out to others in the doing of good deeds. In addition to that, he now adds in that not only should others prosper from their sowing, but that they should likewise be "enriched in everything." It is looking to an increase for them as well.

However, the increase to them again has the purpose of "all liberality." As they increase, they should become all the more charitable in their giving. The idea is that it is God who blesses and the blessings that we are given are not to be secreted away with no useful purpose in mind. Rather, they are to be shared so that others may be blessed as well.

Paul certainly has the recipients of the intended gift in mind. The saints in Jerusalem were in need and in the Corinthian's abundance there was a chance to help that need. In this, it would cause "thanksgiving through us to God." God is glorified through the thanks of those who receive such assistance. In the end, it all came from Him and so praise and thanks should always be directed to Him for what He does for His people.

These verses obviously have to be considered in light of the human condition. There are those who have come on hard times. When this occurs, we should be willing to tend to them and help them out. This is the case with the saints in Jerusalem. There are also those who are simply unwilling to get up and help themselves.

It would be contradictory to think that someone who is unwilling to work should constantly receive what others have worked for. The premise here is that God blesses us to bless others. If God blesses someone through our efforts, then that person should realize where their blessing has come from and endeavor to follow in the same path. However, if they are lazy and unwilling to put forth their own effort, then they cannot be who the Lord is speaking of here.

These verses simply cannot be used to justify wealth redistribution to the indolent and worthless. They need to change their lifestyle, or they need to continue to wallow in the mud which they are unwilling to leave.

Life application: Today, think of someone who has fallen on hard times and think about how you can bless them in their need. Let them know that they are not alone in their trials, but that you are there with them. Such encouragement may be just what they need during their moment of darkness.

Lord God, it is a tough world and there are a lot of folks who are facing great need. Help me to recognize their need and to help them out in a way which will let them know that they are not alone in their trial. Whether through a gift, a word of encouragement, or a prayer with them, help me to be one who is willing to be with them in the dark valley and who will stay with them until they again reach the mountaintop. Amen.

For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, 2 Corinthians 9:12

Paul, in describing the gift which is being gathered, had just mentioned that it is one "which causes thanksgiving through us to God." To explain this further, he says, "For the

administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints." In this, he uses the word *leitourgia* which is translated as "service." It is the basis for our word "liturgy."

In this sense, the giving of the gift is not just to be considered a beneficent act of humanity, but one of religious significance. This is evident from the second half of the verse. In supplying the desperate needs of the saints, the gift "also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God." Thus, this verse is a fuller explanation of the words of the previous verse.

Another word to consider is translated as "supplies." Vincent's Word Studies explains the meaning of the word *prosanapléroó* -

"Lit., fills up by adding to. ... Supplementing what the saints lack. Through many thanksgivings. The need of the poor is filled, like an empty vessel, to the brim, and the supply overflows in the thanksgiving which it calls out. Thus Christian beneficence does a double work, in giving relief and in generating thankfulness."

The "double work" of Christian giving here is 1) taking care of the desperate needs of the saints in Jerusalem, while 2) producing many thanksgivings to God. As can be seen from this, there is a marked difference between the giving of believers and that of non-believers. God is glorified through such giving when it is done by His faithful people.

Life application: God is deserving of all praise and glory for the wonderful blessings He provides among His people. James says that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." As this is so, let us remember to give Him the thanks that He is due. It is right and proper to do so.

Lord God, Your word tells us that every perfect gift is from above. Help us then to see Your hand in the perfect gifts we receive and to return thanks to You for them. Something as simple as a perfectly placed flower on the side of the path of life may be just what we need to lighten our burdens. If that does it, then help us to remember to thank You for providing the flower for our comfort. May our praise never be lacking in the good gifts You supply. Amen.

...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*,
2 Corinthians 9:13

This verse is widely translated and debated over. Charles Ellicott notes that its construction is that "of a participle which has no direct grammatical connection with what precedes." It is a stand-alone thought. The words "through the proof of this ministry" are not clear concerning what is being referred to. Is it the service that is being provided or is it referring to the people who render the service?

Either way, the result is that the Jewish believers who will receive the gift will "glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ." They will see that the message of Christ has led to the Gentiles' faith in Christ. In turn, they will understand that the message didn't just go into the ears and out again, but it sank down into their hearts, resulting in obedience to the teachings of the Lord.

This obedience is evidenced, as noted above, either in the gift which is made or in the willing hearts of those who gave the gift. In the end, they together form into a whole ministry which results in their "liberal sharing with them and all *men*."

Paul is making it clear that what is being evidenced is a willingness to be obedient to the precepts that come along with receiving the gospel. Further, their status as Gentiles does not affect their ability to truly commune with the Jewish believers they are ministering to. Instead, "...there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him" (Romans 10:12).

Life application: Though there are many cultures on the earth with many different traditions and ways of worshipping the Lord, if they are Christians, they are a part of the body and on an equal footing with all others. It is unrealistic to think that our personal form of worship is the only way to honor the Lord. Instead, He has called people out from all places in order to worship Him in spirit and in truth. The externals are far less important than what is going on inside the heart.

Lord Jesus, from time to time I see different people worshipping You in ways or in settings that are completely unfamiliar to me. Instead of thinking that they are doing it wrong, I rejoice that You have accepted them as they are. Their heritage, culture, and upbringing, have made them who they are and You have accepted them in just that way. How marvelous it is to see the nations rejoice in You in a multitude of wonderful ways. I can't wait for the day when we are all gathered together in Your presence to praise You as one, and yet just as we are! Amen.

...and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. 2 Corinthians 9:14

The actual intent of Paul's words here is debated over, but what is certain is that the Greek is confusing. Albert Barnes gives the following analysis -

"On the grammatical construction of this difficult verse, Doddridge and Bloomfield may be consulted. It is probably to be taken in connection with 2 Corinthians 9:12, and 2 Corinthians 9:13 is a parenthesis. Thus interpreted, the sense will be, 'The administration of this service [2 Corinthians 9:12] will produce abundant thanks to God. It will also [2 Corinthians 9:14] produce another effect. It will tend to excite the prayers of the saints for you, and thus produce important benefits to yourselves. They will earnestly desire your welfare, they will anxiously pray to be united in Christian friendship with those who have been so signally endowed with the grace of God.'"

Because of the difficult nature of the Greek, this seems to be in line with what Paul was trying to say. He was taking these other verses and tying them together with the words of this verse. One way or another, an effect would be produced in the hearts of the people in Jerusalem towards the Gentile churches who had given the gift. They would come to understand that the Gentiles, like them, had received God's exceeding grace. With this knowledge, they would then glorify God. This is actually what occurred as well, as is documented in Acts at the time that the gift was presented to them -

"And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord." Acts 21:17-20

Life application: There are portions of Scripture which are complicated, but understanding or misunderstanding them is because of our limitations, not God's. We need to take the Bible as a whole and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. In doing so, there will always be a satisfactory explanation for that which is at first difficult to understand.

Lord God, help us to be pure in our intentions towards Your word. When we come to it, keep our hearts open to what You want us to see and not just what we want to see. You have given us instructions that are easily manipulated by teachers with personal agendas, and which can then lead others down wrong paths. Keep us from this Lord. Instead, help us to revere Your word and to accept it in context and with the understanding that it is our guide to right living and a right relationship with You. Amen.

Thanks *be* to God for His indescribable gift! 2 Corinthians 9:15

To end the chapter, and also the topic of the collection of the gift, Paul breaks into a sudden and emotional proclamation of thanksgiving. This is not at all unique to his writings as he elsewhere suddenly breaks forth in praise and thanks to God. It is as if Paul contemplated the words which he had penned and couldn't restrain himself at certain points. And not only was it an internal expression, but one which he simply had to share with others as well.

The word for "thanks" is the same as the word elsewhere translated as "grace." Even in the previous verse it is used this way. There it said, "...and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you." Scholars debate what this "grace" is intended to be. Is it the Holy Spirit? Is it Christ Jesus? The answer seems likely to be the same "grace" which he just mentioned. He turned the thought around from "the exceeding grace of God in you" into "thanks."

If this is so, then it refers to the entire process of salvation which was initiated through their "confession to the gospel of Christ" which was mentioned in verse 13. Because of their salvation which came from this confession, and because of their obedience to it, all things were working out for a good and common goal among the saints. In other words, it all comes back to the work of Jesus Christ in them. He is the gift of God through which all other things find their right and proper place.

And this seems certain by the use of the word "indescribable." The Greek word from which this is translated is used only here in the New Testament. It comes from two separate words. The first is a negative prefix and the second is a word which means "to declare." In other words, there are simply no words which could fully express this gift. This is certainly the case concerning the Person and work of Christ. He is the indescribable Gift which is the basis of every other good thing which comes down from the Father of heavenly lights.

Life application: If you are in the mood to break out in praise or thanks to God, don't hold it in. You might explode. Let it out!

Glorious God! I want to praise You and thank You for Your indescribable Gift, my Lord Jesus. Without Him, I would be forever separated from You. I would have no hope and no reason to exist. Life would be a vain pursuit which would terminate in an oblong box. But though I may end up there, it will only be a temporary place of rest until I am brought

*back for an eternal walk in Your presence. And all of it is because of the Gift of Jesus.
Thanks be to You for this indescribable Gift! Amen.*

CHAPTER 10

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.

2 Corinthians 10:1

In beginning a new subject, we read an emphatic expression, "Now I Paul." It is an expression he uses several times elsewhere in his epistles to indicate particularly strong emotions. After this emphatic introduction, he says to the Corinthians that he is "pleading with *you* by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

The intent is that in his plea he desires not to be thought of as an authoritarian ruler, but to rather be an emulation of the Lord. Those in Corinth, like all people who are saved, were granted gentle mercy. Instead of a rod of iron, they received meekness and tenderness. Paul's plea to them is in hopes of emulating that example rather than requiring him to be harsh towards them.

To show that he can be either, he says while still speaking about himself, "...who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you." This will be further explained in verse 10, but the intent is that the impression of those in Corinth is that Paul's attitude when present with them was not one of a strong leader. Rather, they looked at him as timid and not capable of enforcing discipline.

However, when he was absent from them he was bold toward them. Though not stated yet, this implies that his letters represented him in his absence as to who he would be when present. And so, the thought this verse is conveying is as follows -

- He is pleading with the Corinthians in the spirit of Christ, which is one of "meekness and gentleness." This is in hopes of the Corinthians responding to his appeal without them requiring him to be bold and harsh.
- He has demonstrated a lowly, humble attitude among them in the past and so they would expect him to be the same when he returns.
- Even if his letters are bold, it is just a letter, and his actions won't match his words.
- Therefore, they have nothing to fear concerning him being bold and harsh.

Life application: We should remember Paul's careful explanation of himself here and realize that just because an individual displays an easygoing character, it may be that there is a point where that will change. Moses was noted as the most humble man ever,

but he also demonstrated boldness when needed. The lesson is that we should never "push the buttons" of another and assume that their gentle demeanor is all we will see of them.

Lord God, the stresses of life can well up in us and change us from who we normally are into a different person. Sometimes the change may be a good one and allow us to do great things that we normally wouldn't do. But sometimes the change may not be good, and we may do something we would otherwise regret later. Moses lost his patience, acted contrarily, and lost his right to enter the Land of Promise. Help us to learn from such examples and give us the ability to withhold our dark side from taking over and causing irreparable harm to our relationships with others. Help us in this, O Lord. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 10:2

Paul just noted that his attitude and demeanor is considered "lowly" when he is present, but "bold" when he is not. In this, the assumption was made that when he came again, he wouldn't be bold when it was necessary. Now, to correct that deficient assumption, he shows that he can be bold when necessary. The implication is that he has restrained from being so in the past, but the future may be different. This is evidenced by the word "but."

Contrary to their perceptions, Paul begs for them to consider his authority and his ability to exercise that authority. He does this by saying, "...that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some." There is an obvious tension between Paul and some in the congregation. He has restrained from calling them out, but should they continue with their negative attitude towards him, he fully intends to highlight it and bring his authority against it.

And the cause for the tension is that those he is referring to "think of us as if we walked according to the flesh." Albert Barnes notes that -

"They suppose this; or, they accuse me of it. By the word "us" here Paul means himself, though it is possible also that he speaks in the name of his fellow apostles and laborers who were associated with him, and the objections may have referred to all who acted with him."

Whether this is only Paul who is being accused of this, or whether it is he and his associates, some were saying that he or they "walk" according to the flesh. The word "walk" is an idiom for one's way of life and conduct. Therefore, they are saying that Paul (and others possibly) were not walking appropriately, but were living their lives in one way while speaking and teaching in another.

Paul will show them in the coming verses that "walking in the flesh," which we all do while living in this fallen human body, is not the same as "warring in the flesh." There is a distinction to be made and it will correct these troublemaker's faulted accusations against him.

Life application: Unfortunately, even the most humble elder or pastor must at times take off the gloves and speak firmly and forcefully in order to silence those who would disturb the fellowship. Paul's example here, along with many others in Scripture, shows that when a heavier hand is necessary, it is to be brought out and used.

Lord God, help us to walk in harmony with one another to the greatest extent possible, overlooking the faults of others. But also give us the discernment, courage, and ability to see when a stronger hand of correction is needed. When such a time arises, help us to enforce Your standards rather than caving into the wiles of those who look only to divide and cause dissension. Help us Lord to be wise in this way, holding fast to the truths of Your word above all else. Amen.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.

2 Corinthians 10:3

It is of note that Paul says, "For though we walk in the flesh..." Walking in the flesh is a term used several times to indicate living in a worldly way. For examples, see 2 Corinthians 1:17, Romans 8:12-13, 1 Corinthians 1:26. And yet, the same term is also used to show that we are simply temporal beings with limited human capabilities and with all of the associated frailties. A few such verses are Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:22-24, and even 1 Timothy 3:16 which is speaking of Christ.

Therefore, unlike the previous verse, here he is not equating a "walk in the flesh" with sin and worldliness, but with the frailties we possess which can lead to sin and worldliness. In this body of infirmity, "though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh."

The Greek word from which the idea of waging war comes from speaks of a soldier executing his duties in battle. This is a common theme that Paul uses in his writings. He will continue with this line of thought and explain it in the verses ahead. There is a real battle going on, and it is a battle in which we are engaged. However, it is not a battle that is waged on a worldly, fleshly level. Rather it is one that is waged in the Spirit.

This battle is spoken of by Paul in Romans 8 -

"So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness."

Romans 8:8-10

Life application: We cannot deny that we are in fallen bodies and those bodies have frustrating limitations, some of which cause us to stumble. But God gives us more grace. We have been saved by the blood of Christ and are already seated with Him in the heavenly places. When we stumble, let us get up, brush ourselves off, and get back into the battle. We are in a war until we are called home. Therefore, as soldiers under authority, we need to conduct ourselves according to the word of our Leader.

Heavenly Father, we can't deny that we're in weak and frail bodies that easily stumble in times of temptation, stress, or distress. But we also know that You give more grace. Help us to not get stuck on the ground, but to re-gather our strength and reengage the battle set before us. Thank You for having already forgiven us for the times we have or will fall. Thank You for the immeasurable love You have shown us in the giving of Jesus to reconcile us to You. Help us in this daily battle to wage the good war until the day You call us home. Amen.

For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 2 Corinthians 10:4

The words of this verse show us that along with our war noted in the previous verse which is "not in the flesh," the weapons that we use are not material (or carnal) weapons. Rather they are spiritual. They are described by Paul in several places of the New Testament such as -

"But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation." 1 Thessalonians 5:8

An even fuller description is found in Ephesians 6:11-16. In these verses, he uses real, tangible things and equates them to spiritual concepts. It is with these spiritual things that we do indeed battle against the forces of evil. Starting in this verse, and for the next couple of verses, he will explain how these weapons are focused, beginning with, "for pulling down strongholds."

This is a military concept where someone who is in a defensive position has their fortress pulled down from around them so that they can be easily attacked and overcome. A beautiful example of this concept is found in 2 Samuel 17 -

"Therefore I advise that all Israel be fully gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba, like the sand that *is* by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person. ¹² So we will come upon him in some place where he may be found, and we will fall on him as the dew falls on the ground. And of him and all the men who *are* with him there shall not be left so much as one. ¹³ Moreover, if he has withdrawn into a city, then all Israel shall bring ropes to that city; and we will pull it into the river, until there is not one small stone found there." 2 Samuel 17:11-13

It should be noted now that just because Paul is speaking of a spiritual battle which uses spiritual implements to obtain its purposes, this does not exclude Christians from entering true battles with real weapons. This type of sleight of hand use of a verse to mean something not intended is common and it is inappropriate. Just because Christians are in a spiritual war does not mean that they are limited only to spiritual battle.

Life application: There is a spiritual battle which rages around us. It is as real as any other type of warfare, but it involves matters of the highest importance. We must be ready at all times with the weapons of our battle and employ them in faith against the unseen enemies that come against us. Take time to read Ephesians 6:11-17 and think on Paul's use of terminology concerning our spiritual warfare.

Lord God, Your word says that we are in a spiritual battle and that we need to have the right implements of war in order to properly wage war, and to counter attacks which come against us from the enemy around us. Give us the wisdom to pull down his strongholds so that we can enter into his defensive line and attack him where he is weak. Allow us the honor of giving the devil more than just a black eye as we fight against his wiles. Thank You for being with us in this Lord! Amen.

...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,
2 Corinthians 10:5

Scholars assign the "casting down arguments" to the "we" of verse 3 and not the "weapons" of verse 4. This is based on the agreement of the participle between the two thoughts. In other words, "...we war casting down arguments." One use of our spiritual warfare is that we are to have enough knowledge of the source of our faith to challenge those who reason against it.

There are many who deny the Christian faith entirely, there are those who defend their own misguided religions, and there are heretics within the faith - all of these are opponents who need to be challenged. Their arguments need to be cast down and crushed by the superior knowledge and revelation which comes from the Christian faith.

Likewise, we are to cast down "every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God." Charles Ellicott notes that, "The noun probably belongs, like 'stronghold,' to the language of military writers, and indicates one of the rock fortresses ... which were so conspicuous in all ancient systems of defence."

The opponents of Christianity set themselves up as if in a mountain fortress that cannot be reached by their enemies. They shoot their weapons, intending to destroy the argument of Christianity, but we have the true "knowledge of God" on our side and therefore our attacks can and will prevail when they are properly engaged in the battle. The enemy feels exalted, but by standing on the truth of God, his arguments will be cast down. The sentiment is found in Job -

"They are exalted for a little while,
Then they are gone.
They are brought low;
They are taken out of the way like all *others*;
They dry out like the heads of grain." Job 24:24

Finally, the waging of our warfare is essential for "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Paul continues with military terms. After pulling down the strongholds and storming the high things which attempt to exalt themselves, captives are taken. Jesus referred to exactly this when He presented Himself in the synagogue in Nazareth -

“The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to *the* poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to *the* captives
And recovery of sight to *the* blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Luke 4:18, 19

However, the intent is not the literal, physical destruction of the enemy, but to bring them into a new stronghold, one which is "to the obedience of Christ." If their arguments fail, it means that they were ineffective. Anyone who would cling onto an ineffective argument (and there are many) are perverse and will face God without Christ. But for those who are captured by obedience to Christ, they will face God in a completely different way. They will be free from the destruction that the enemies of Christ will face.

Life application: There is only one proper way of waging the war which Paul writes of. It is to know Jesus Christ and to be able to defend our faith in Him. And the only way to do that is to read, study, and comprehend the truths which are found in the Bible. When we do this, we will be fully prepared to engage in the battle with those who oppose His message.

Heavenly Father, if the message of Jesus Christ is true, then it is a rational, defensible faith. It is a message which is capable of pulling down the strongholds which resist it, storming any high and lofty message which stands against it, and bringing any unreasonable teachings against it into captivity to the truth. And the only way we can accomplish this is through knowing Your word. Help us, O Lord, to pursue it and to know it so that we can then defend it. Let us not waste our days in futile pursuit. The souls of men are at stake. Help us to remember this and to be ready for the battle. Amen.

...and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.
2 Corinthians 10:6

Paul finishes this thought with the continued use of a military metaphor. When an enemy is subdued and the military has gained control over their foe, there are inevitably rebels who still want to continue the fight by attacking the conquerors. They may sneak in and kill one at a time, or they may disrupt supply lines, or even attack directly against the headquarters of the victor.

Though there is little chance of success, they remain disobedient to the terms of surrender in hopes of reigniting the battle and somehow overcoming those who vanquished them. This is the case in the world today. Satan has been vanquished, and yet he continues to send his minions out in hopes of somehow thwarting Christ's victory.

This spiritual warfare is what Paul is referring to and there is a time when the obedience of the saints is fulfilled, and the church age will come to a close. At that point, all disobedience will be punished. Those who have attempted to overthrow the victory of Christ will themselves be overthrown. This is what is coming in the book of Revelation and just prior to His return to dwell among His people during the millennium.

Life application: Though the victory is already accomplished in Christ, there are those who harass and attack His people. This will continue, but all such harassment will end in futility, and all of it will be punished at the right time. Until then, we should pray for those who are our enemies and do our best to witness to them of the truth of Jesus Christ.

Lord God, the victory is found in Jesus. The battle is won, and the time is coming when He will reign among His people. But until then, there are still those rebellious toward the Victor and toward those who are victorious in Him. We have a spiritual battle to wage against them until You call us home. Help us to be sound witnesses to the faith and help us to have the right attitude to bring many out of their rebellion and into the gracious hand of our Victor. Be exalted through our warfare for those who so desperately need You. Amen.

Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced 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. 2 Corinthians 10:7

It should be noted that this sentence, like other clauses in this section of Paul's writing, could be taken in one of three ways.

- As an interrogative - "Do you look at things?"
- As an imperative - "Look on things...", or
- As an indicative - "You look on things..."

Scholars disagree on what his intent is, and so translations vary. No matter which structure Paul intended, the idea of the "outward appearance" would be fully understood by his audience. It was an idiom then as it is now. Jesus uses it in John 7:24 -

"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Paul wants them to know that the outward appearance is not always reflective of the inward man. There were those who claimed to be "of Christ" noted in 1 Corinthians 1:12. They claimed to be His followers and that their allegiance was to Him alone. However, the word of God and the instruction for the people who had not seen Christ came through the teachings of the apostles. Therefore, if they rejected what the apostles said, then how could they be "of Christ?"

Likewise, there were those who may have seen Christ and heard his ministry and yet were not commissioned by Him. They may have been of the same area that He came from, of the same tribe as Him, etc. Thus, they could claim a special affiliation with Him. It would be enticing to follow such a person. This happens today when people follow the teachings of a Jewish person because they are Jewish, regardless as to whether they actually teach the Bible correctly or not. "Oh, they can speak Hebrew. They must be super religious and all-knowing." It is an incorrect and dangerous way of pursuing one's religion.

The list could go on and on - fine orators, seemingly Spirit-given gifts of healings, tongues, or miracles, etc. could lead people to say, "I am of Christ." The Christian world is besieged by such people today and many of them are charlatans. To counter this, Paul says, "If anyone is convinced 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."

How is one to tell? It all must go back to the commission of the individual by Christ. If they were commissioned by Him, then the others who were also commissioned could testify to their apostleship. Paul received such a testimony on several occasions. Now, with the apostolic era ended, there is one and only one way to determine the truth of the matter - the Bible. It is our sole inspired witness to the Person and work of Jesus Christ. It is also the source which reveals the apostolic teachings on Him.

Our consideration as to whether we are Christ's or not must come from this word. Have we trusted the God of the Bible who is revealed in the Person of Jesus in the Bible? There is a logical way to know. God has not left our faith up to emotion and He has not

left it up to any teaching of man. Instead, He has given us the Bible for us to know that our faith is properly directed.

Life application: Paul, who is the apostle to the Gentiles, has his apostleship substantiated in writing in the Bible's pages. We don't need to guess whether his words are inspired or not. Instead, we can know with absolute assurance that they are. When he says that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus who is revealed in the Bible, we should take that at face value. Don't be led astray by those who would add in works to what Christ has already done. Have faith that His work is sufficient to save.

Heavenly Father, we have to return time and again to the truth that Your word is the only inspired source of who Jesus is and what He did. And therefore, all of our doctrine concerning Him must be found in that same source. If it could come from any other place, then there would be utter chaos and no hope of knowing You correctly. Help me to get my nose into the Bible and to not trust the deceitful teachings of man. You have truly given us a sure word to exercise our faith rightly. Thank You for Your superior word! Amen.

For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed—
2 Corinthians 10:8

Paul uses the word for "boast" 36 times in his letters, but 20 of them are in 2 Corinthians. It appears that he almost has an insecurity complex which has built up in him concerning his dealings with the Corinthians and he is working through that by the use of this word.

It is as if they questioned his authority when he was the one who established the church among them. Time and time again, he returns to this word to show that he and the other apostles do have the authority necessary to conduct themselves as the Lord's representatives.

Again, he turns to the idea of boasting - "For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority." In the previous verse he wanted them to consider his and his associates' position "in Christ." Now, he brings in not just that they are "in Christ" but that they have "authority" within the body to exercise discipline, establish doctrine, etc. In 1 Corinthians 5, he directed the church to take certain actions concerning a person who was engaged in sexual immorality. It wasn't a request, but rather a directive.

Elsewhere he writes of both commands and exhortations. And the reason for this is that the authority is that "which the Lord gave us." It was granted by the Head of the church and therefore the church was to understand this. But in a gentle note, he relays that the authority is "for edification and not for your destruction."

What is obvious is that if the Lord is building a church, He will assign people to positions of authority to build it up, not destroy it. If a person starts a company, his goal is to make it successful. He wouldn't hire someone to tear apart the company, but to direct it so that it will grow and flourish. Anything less would be contrary to the end-goal of the company. The same is true with the church.

Because of this, in his boasting Paul says, "I shall not be ashamed." If he has been granted authority, and if he uses that authority to edify - just as would be expected - then he would have a right to boast in the authority he possessed. And this wouldn't be a haughty, self-directed boasting, but one which was in satisfaction for having proved faithful to the One who established him in the position in the first place.

Life application: In our walk with Christ, we all have opportunities to lead. Every Christian has the chance, for example, to lead someone else to Christ. That is an authority which has been granted to any saved believer. If we use that authority, then is it wrong to boast in it? The answer is, "No." If it is proper boasting, then it is acceptable. Later in this chapter, Paul will show us that when we glory, it should be in the Lord. If our boasting is directed to Him, then it cannot be wrong.

Heavenly Father, it is amazing that any believer who has the simple knowledge of who Jesus is can lead another person to that same saving knowledge. And yet, how often do we fail to simply open our mouths and speak? The one path to heaven's riches isn't spoken of by us for fear of failure, or maybe giving offense. Why should we care about these things? Help us to put our duty to You into practice and to be willing to tell others of the great message of salvation which came through Calvary's cross. Amen.

...lest I seem to terrify you by letters. 2 Corinthians 10:9

These words are dependent on the previous verse. Paul mentioned that he might somewhat boast about the authority that he and the others possessed, an authority which was given to them by the Lord for the edification of their audience. In that boasting, he says that he won't be ashamed, "lest I seem to terrify you by letters."

In other words, even if his letters bring about a sense of being frightened, he would not be ashamed of causing this type of result. The reason for this will be explained in the coming verses, but he is saying in advance that his boasting in the weight of his letters is not an empty boasting, but rather one which bears his authority to act upon what he has written.

Because of this, if the Corinthians were terrified of his letters, they should also be terrified of whatever action the letters threaten. If that action proves to be necessary, Paul will carry out what he has written.

As a side point, the wording of the Greek says, *dia ton epistalon*, or "by means of the letters." It is plural. For this reason, many scholars believe that there is another letter that Paul wrote to them which is not included in the Bible, and which is referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9. This verse may support that theory, but it does not prove it. It could be that he is referring to 1 Corinthians and the letter he is now writing, 2 Corinthians.

Life application: Paul is often very direct in his words as are other authors of the Bible. There are statements which are taken in today's politically correct world to be too forceful, or the remnants of a less-cultured or loving time. Even many words of Jesus are disregarded because they speak of judgment, hell, and condemnation. But let us stand on these truths and never withhold speaking them when it is appropriate to do so. Just because the "world" finds offense at the word of God, we have no excuse to not declare its whole counsel.

Lord God, Your word stands. Many things included in it, even from the mouth of Jesus, are considered as too offensive to be declared in today's politically correct world. Words of righteous indignation, justice, judgment, and everlasting punishment are disregarded, even when spoken by Him. But they are a part of the truth of Your word. Give us the fortitude to be willing to speak of these things without compromise so that the entirety of Your word is presented to the world. Amen.

"For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." 2 Corinthians 10:10

Paul now notes how both he and his letters are perceived by his audience. "For his letters" is speaking of the letters of instruction that he wrote to the churches, some of which are now the epistles found in the Bible. The words "they say" are speaking of the people who received them. They would read Paul's words and come to the conclusion which he will next note in this verse about himself.

Before looking at their conclusion though, it should be noted that many manuscripts say, "...he said" rather than "they say." It is in the singular. It could be then that this is Paul's way of writing in an impersonal manner, referring to any individual who reads his words. Or it could be that there was actually one person who was the ringleader of the group who opposed Paul. If so, then it is he who made the charge which will be specified as the verse continues. Though it can't be determined which is correct, both should be considered. Paul was not without enemies, even in the churches he established.

Concerning the letters, they are noted as "weighty and powerful." This is surely the case. History has borne out that Paul's letters have the greatest weight and the utmost power. They have been studied for 2000 years and yet they still produce hidden treasures for us to consider. Within them are special words which have been used in unusual and particular ways to bring forth the most precise doctrine. There are numerous patterns which permeate his writings, and which show the highest of intelligence and the sure mark of inspiration. They are the greatest of treasures for the hungry human soul who needs to understand the grace of God which is found in Jesus Christ.

But his detractors looked at his letters as somewhat of a contradiction to him as a man. Despite his letters being so weighty and powerful, they note that "*his* bodily presence *is* weak, and his speech is contemptible." The weak presence of Paul is hinted at throughout the book of Acts as well as in his own writings. He carried afflictions with him, and he seemed to need to be accompanied everywhere he went, as if he couldn't take care of himself as he traveled.

The contemptible speech is literally "speech of no value." Charles Ellicott thinks this means either a "weak or unmusical voice, or to the absence of the rhetorical artifices, the exordium, divisions, perorations, in which Greek audiences delighted." With these infirmities, those who opposed him made the supposition that there was a disconnect between what he wrote and what he could actually carry out.

In essence, they felt assured that his letters were mere braggadocio and that there was no true authority in the man himself to enforce the words he wrote. He will correct them on this. His challengers mistook his humility and physical weakness as weakness of character and as an inability to exercise his apostolic authority. Instead, however, these were actually strengths which they had misunderstood.

Interestingly, this verse shows us an amazing parallel between Moses and Paul. When Moses was given his commission at the burning bush, we read his words of response to the Lord -

“O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue.” – Exodus 4:10

We see that like Paul, Moses' speech was "contemptible." And yet, human history has never seen words more "weighty and powerful" than those of Moses. It is of great interest that the Lord chose these two men, with these similar impediments, to reveal His intentions for the people of the world. Moses revealed the law while Paul explained the grace.

But the parallel between the two doesn't stop there. In verse 10:1, Paul spoke of the "meekness and gentleness of Christ" which he possessed and how he was lowly among them, meaning humble. Moses likewise was characterized in this way, being called "very humble, more than all men who *were* on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

The Lord appears to have chosen these men for their weaknesses so that His power could be revealed through them. He also chose them for their humility, so that His own compassion would be more fully understood through them as well. Those who challenged both Moses and Paul underestimated the true power that they held, and they ultimately strove against the One who commissioned them in the first place.

Life application: Let us never assume that someone of humility is weak and ineffective. Let us also never assume that one who is physically infirm is incapable of accomplishing great feats of strength. Instead, let us look at these aspects of the person and see how the Lord can work through them to reveal His own greatness.

Heavenly Father, how often do we look at people with a physical infirmity and think that they are incapable of doing great things? And yet, quite often the opposite turns out to be true. And how often do we look at someone who exhibits humility and make the assumption that they are of weak character. And yet, Your word shows time and time again that You can and do work through these things to reveal Your own greatness. Help us to look at the inner man and not merely judge by externals. Help us to see You and Your power revealed through what man often perceives as weakness. Open our eyes and hearts to Your great hand in the lives of others. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 10:11

This takes us right back to the first two verses of the chapter -

"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. ² 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."

After that, each subsequent verse has built upon the thought. He was perceived as being "bold" when he wrote his letters, but when he was present, they perceived him as "lowly." They made the assumption from this that his letters were only a facade with no substance behind them. Rather however, when he was present, he attempted to be meek and gentle, emulating Christ.

He lets them now know that when it becomes necessary for him to show his boldness, he would not object to doing so. In order to show them that this was the case, he begins this verse with, "Let such a person consider this." It is a way of introducing his next words, asking for sober consideration of them. And the thought to be presented is "that we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *we will also be* in deed when we are present."

Translators insert a few words for clarity here. Instead of "*such we will also be*" it should read "such we are." The reason is that if Paul intended it to be in the future tense, he would have expressed the verb. As he did not, it implies that it is in the present tense. The character of the person in the letters is the same as the character of the person at all times. It didn't matter if he and the other apostles were present or absent, they were consistent in their deeds and actions.

Life application: The Bible is God's word to us. It reflects who He is, and Jesus is the One who reveals Him. He is the subject of our being able to comprehend who God is. His word while He is absent reflects who He will be when He is again present. Therefore, though He is loving, as His word describes Him, He is also just, righteous, and holy. He will not spare those who reject Him. What is your impression of Jesus? The only way to know how He will treat you is to know His word and what it expects of you. Don't believe the lie that He is not in Person who He is in His word.

Heavenly Father, You have given us Your word to know and understand Jesus. And yet, we seem to pick and choose the Jesus we want to know. We accept the words which tell us of His gentle, meek, and loving side, but we often fail to accept the words which tell of His righteousness, holiness, and that He is coming again to judge the world for rejecting Him. How can we have a right impression of our Lord unless we consider the whole counsel of the word which reveals Him? Help us to be faithful to Your superior word - all of it. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 10:12

Paul has been speaking of the perception of him by some of those in Corinth. In the preceding verse he let them know that the person he is in his letters is who he will be in their presence. Understanding that, he says, "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves." The Geneva Bible notes that he is actually speaking in a taunting manner. The words form an assonance which is lost in English, but which reveals his demeanor towards those he is challenging.

In his words, but without doing so again, he alludes to the accusations of self-commendation that he has written about several times already. These are found in 2 Corinthians 3:1; 4:2; & 5:12. Here in this verse he doesn't allude to these directly, but rather implicitly through the use of the words, "For we dare not..."

What is implied is that the people he is writing about, however, are doing just that. Continuing on, he says directly, "But they..." These are the instigators which have been the subject of his words and now they continue to be. It is they who spend their time "measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves." They have set a false standard and then they have used that standard in order to make their evaluations of all others, including Paul and the other apostles.

His words do include a touch of irony though. By saying that he would never compare himself with those who commend themselves, he is actually doing just that. However, it is in a taunt rather than in a direct manner. But there must always be a basis by which he can show them their folly and so the words are appropriate.

It seems certain that, as in several verses previously seen in this epistle, he has the book of Proverbs on his mind. On several occasions, Solomon writes about someone who is wise in his own eyes. One example which Paul may have been thinking of is verse 26:12-

"Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?
There is more hope for a fool than for him." Proverbs 26:12

As Charles Ellicott notes about Paul's words -

"Of all such self-admiration—one might almost say, of all such autolatry—St. Paul declares, what the experience of all ages attests, that they who practise it 'are not wise.' They lose, as the Greek verb more definitely expresses it, all power of discernment."

In their lack of discernment, they were looking at themselves and their accomplishments as superior to all others. In so doing, no one could ever meet their supposedly unattainable mark. The inevitable result is that they would condemn everyone around them as lowly and contemptible.

Life application: Proverbs is filled with wisdom for those who are willing to receive it. The problem with attempting to enlighten those who are wise in their own eyes is that they will never be able to see the true wisdom through their own self-idolizing glare.

Lord God, the Bible teaches us to not be wise in our own eyes. If we are, then we will never be able to receive true wisdom when it comes our way. Help us to be humble and meek in our opinions about ourselves and to realize that Your word was written by You, the One who fashioned us in the first place. Therefore, to pursue true wisdom, we need to turn to what You have provided. And what a superior word it is! Thank You for the heaps of wisdom which pour from every page. Thank You for it Lord. Amen.

We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. 2 Corinthians 10:13

The sense of this verse seems plain enough, but to understand it in context, it should be taken with the preceding two verses.

"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. We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you."

Paul spoke of himself and his associates as not putting themselves in the same class as those who would commend themselves. The reason is that in their commending of

themselves, they became their own standard of measurement for everyone else and thus everyone else would seem lower than their supposed high and lofty measurement.

On the other hand, he says that, "We, however, will not boast beyond measure." There was a limit to what they could boast of. If they were their own standard, there could be no limit, but because they had limitations, their boast would be within those limits. And that is "within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us."

The word "sphere" here is *kanón*. It is a word only used by Paul and it is only found in 2 Corinthians and Galatians. According to Vincent's Word Studies, it indicates "a straight rod or ruler. Hence a carpenter's rule. Metaphorically, that which measures or determines anything, in morals, art, or language. The Alexandrian grammarians spoke of the classic Greek authors collectively as the canon or standard of the pure language. In later Greek it was used to denote a fixed tax. In christian literature it came to signify the standard of faith or of christian teaching; the creed; the rule of Church discipline, and the authorized collection of sacred writings. Hence canon of Scripture."

Paul and his associates had a limit which was set by God. They didn't boast outside of those boundaries. They didn't claim the work of another, they didn't speak of areas they had never evangelized as if they had, etc. They simply spoke of the authority that they had been granted by God and went no further.

However, as a large slap in the face to those he is particularly addressing, he finishes with, "...a sphere which especially includes you." Those who had been comparing themselves with themselves are being told that they are, in fact, not the standard. Instead, they don't even rise to the standard which God had set for Paul and the others with him. Therefore, Paul had a right to exercise his authority over them when he came to Corinth. If necessary, he would do so without compunction.

Life application: Let none of us think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

Heavenly Father, how good it is to know that You have set the boundaries of our lives. Because of this, we have no need to act boastfully as if we had set our own borders. Nor do we need to feel shame because our sphere of influence is somehow limited - as if we have failed You. Instead, we can know that the borders of our walk in this life have been ordained by You. We can praise You for who we are and feel satisfied that the life we have been granted is exactly what You intended. And so, if we live it for You, You will be pleased with it. Thank You for this reassurance. Amen.

For we are not overextending ourselves (as though *our authority* did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; 2 Corinthians 10:14

Paul just noted that the sphere of influence which he and his fellow workers encompassed was one which God had appointed, and that sphere also included those at Corinth. Building on that, he says then that "we are not overextending ourselves." He had not gone outside of his divinely appointed sphere of influence. Rather, he was perfectly within his rights to claim authority over Corinth. He had established the church and continued to instruct it and direct it.

He then gives a parenthetical thought, "...as though *our authority* did not extend to you." For whatever reason, some intimated that their authority didn't reach out and encompass Corinth. Maybe they heard another teacher who was more eloquent and thought, "This is our true leader." Whatever prompted them to assume that they were outside of Paul's authority, it was incorrect. To confirm this, Paul reminds them that "it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ."

He and his associates were the first to preach the gospel to them; a message which they then received. Therefore, whoever came after them were actually intruders. It was inappropriate for someone else to come along and assume control of the congregation which was established by others. It was Paul's right, established by God in the granting of his sphere of influence, to boast over them and to continue to direct them.

Life application: In this world people very quickly take credit for the good deeds of others but are even quicker to put the blame for what is wrong on those same people. A very good example of this is the office of president. When a new president is elected, if he is a man lacking character, he will do just this. He will take the credit for what is sound and properly functioning, even if he had no part in it, and he will continue to blame his predecessor for every bad thing which occurs, even if those things are completely his fault. Watch out for people like this and watch out for yourself as well. Don't be like such losers. They are corrupt and their corruption is infectious.

Lord God, help us to be people of integrity who will give credit where credit is due and who will stand up and acknowledge our own failings without casting the blame on others. Help us to not follow the example of those who tend to do just this. Grant us the intestinal fortitude to act in a way which brings honor to You, both through our accomplishments and our failings. In this, You will certainly be pleased with us. Thank You for Your kind hand of grace upon us. Amen.

...not boasting of things beyond measure, *that is*, in other men's labors, but having hope, *that* as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere,
2 Corinthians 10:15

In just the previous verse, Paul noted that his sphere of influence extended to those in Corinth, even those who opposed him. Therefore, he cannot be charged with "boasting of things beyond measure." Rather, it was those who exalted themselves that were following this exact path. As Paul had introduced the gospel there and established the church, then when someone made themselves the standard by which the churches' affairs were to be evaluated, they stepped over Paul's sphere of influence, not the other way around.

Continuing on, he notes that his sphere is not "in other men's labors." This was a principle tenet of Paul. He sought to establish churches where none existed. It is true that he met with churches established by others, but he did not extend his "sphere of influence" over them. It is one thing for a pastor to go to a different church while traveling and join in the fellowship, but it is another for him to walk into that church and ask for a seat behind the pulpit with the pastor of that church. He has no right to such a position because it is not within his sphere of influence.

In contrast to inappropriately extending his authority, he had rightly done so. As he says to them, "...having hope, *that* as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere." The verb here is present tense - "increases." As the faith of those in Corinth increases, the fruits of his labors will also increase. In this, he is giving them a delicate rebuke that it is their lack of faith which is withholding the fruits of the labors he and his associates had sown. They were as if stubborn seed, not willing to put forth the harvest of grain despite the many efforts that had been invested in them.

However, the present tense notes that their faith is increasing and as it continued to do so, it would begin to bear fruit. This is the hope of any good spiritual leader. Eventually, the students will be able to stand up and also begin the process of tilling the soil, sowing the grain, watering the land, and pulling up the weeds as they come forth. The cycle of spreading the gospel would continue in the Corinthians as their faith and knowledge increased.

Life application: Everything that we do should have attached to it the end goal of bringing the gospel to others until the entire church is built up to its completion. When that day comes, the Lord will call His people to be with Himself for all eternity. Let us never tire as we continue on with this marvelous work, which began so long ago.

Lord God, You have been building Your church for over 2000 years, and You are working through Your people to make this happen. Help us to be obedient to our calling and to never tire as we continue on with sharing this message of hope, peace, and reconciliation which comes from You. Grant us hearts that are rightly set on rescuing souls from an otherwise very unhappy end. May You be glorified through our sharing of this eternity-changing message. Amen.

...to preach the gospel in the *regions* beyond you, *and* not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. 2 Corinthians 10:16

The words, "...to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you" are given in connection to the words of the previous verse which said, "...as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere." It is likely that Paul is saying that as the Corinthians grow in their faith, his ministry will benefit as it stretches out into other areas. There are a couple possibilities concerning what he means.

The first is that Paul will be less burdened in dealing with Corinth as they assume a greater role in the conduct of their own church. Or, it may be that Paul is hoping they will assist him in that ministry through prayer or some other means. These conditions though are based on their increased faith, something Paul is working on in his letter of instruction.

Even though he wasn't present with them, his words would be valuable to them for right doctrine. And surely this is the case because even to this day those same words are being read by churches all around the world as a part of the Holy Bible.

In Paul's preaching of the gospel in the regions beyond Corinth, he would be able to start new mission fields "and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment." This is actually a continued response to the charge that he previously addressed. Verses 13 and 14 seem to imply that he was accused of over-extending his sphere of influence, which he refuted. In this verse he goes beyond that and shows that where he intends to go is certainly not in anyone else's sphere of accomplishment.

Where he intended to travel is not totally certain, but it is likely that he is mentally referring to his comments in Romans 15:19-24. There he specifically mentions his desire to go first to Rome and then on to Spain.

Life application: It is so easy to take credit for things which we did not accomplish. Politicians are often caught lying about their past, claiming deeds they did not do.

Pastors have been caught up in such things as well. Any of us can fall prey to this temptation, so let us always stand guard against it. Even if we haven't done great things, we are still accepted by God because of Christ. If God has accepted us, then why should we worry about what mere men think of us!

Heavenly Father, help us to avoid the temptation of claiming things that we never accomplished. Politicians love to make up stories about their past which are untrue. Even Christian leaders have been caught in this. But You have accepted each of us who have received Christ, calling us Your children. If You have accepted us as we are, then why should we ever think we need to impress mere men? No way! Thank You for who I am, just as I am. Amen.

But “he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.” 2 Corinthians 10:17

As the chapter prepares to close, Paul gives this verse. It is a citation which he draws from Jeremiah 9:23, 24 -

"Thus says the LORD:
'Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might,
Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches;
But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me,
That I *am* the LORD, exercising lovingkindness,
judgment, and righteousness in the earth.
For in these I delight,' says the LORD."

It is to be in Christ alone where our boasting should lie. Whatever our accomplishments, they were possible only because of the Lord's hand upon us. Therefore, no man should receive our boastings, including us as individuals:

Churches shouldn't be divided based on allegiances to individual men, i.e. "I am of Paul" or "I am of Cephas," etc.

Our intellectual attainments or knowledge of the Bible shouldn't be credited to either self or to another, such as a great teacher, i.e. "I follow Aristotle," or "I follow John Calvin," or "I follow Albert Einstein," or "I follow Billy Graham."

There should be no desire to emulate the mighty, despite the power they possess.

Our goal shouldn't be to seek after a wealthy person, a politician, or a movie star.

Rather than these things, or any other such division in our allegiance concerning our worldly abilities or spiritual life in Christ, we should direct our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our attention to what God has done in Him through us or to us. In all ways and at all times, "...he who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

Christ is the head of the church; Christ demonstrates and reveals to us the wisdom of God; in Christ are found the otherwise unsearchable riches of knowledge and understanding - both in creation and in Scripture; from Christ is all power and strength; and in Christ all the greatness and majesty of the Godhead is revealed to us. Surely then let us boast and glory in Him alone.

And as a final point, the citation from Jeremiah is speaking of the LORD, or Yehovah. However, Paul uses the citation and applies it to Jesus. The implication is clear - Yehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus in the New. Let us never attempt to diminish the glory of who Christ is. He is our God.

Life application: Be sure to never trade your allegiances for something less than what is the greatest of all. Jesus Christ is the epitome of perfection. In Him is all that is good and wonderful, and so let Him alone be your hope, desire, aspiration, and love.

Supreme and all-glorious God - You alone are worthy of our adoration and boasting. Give us a heart to follow after You and to use as our role model Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who reveals You to us. Thank You for the endless, ceaseless display of glory which You make known through Him as we walk in Your light and in Your holiness. Help us always to fix our eyes, hearts, and our thoughts on Jesus. And thank You for Your word which tells us of Him; Your superior word! Thank You, O God. Amen.

For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

2 Corinthians 10:18

This chapter closes out with words that are alluded to throughout his writings and even throughout the Bible itself. He just said that "...he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." The reason for this is that it is "not he who commends himself" who is approved. One can glory in himself all day long and it doesn't mean that the Lord has accepted him. In fact, it could be a good indication that He hasn't.

Rather, Paul says that it is "whom the Lord commends." In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul even gave an explicit example of this, showing that it is the Lord who will judge our works -

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

Likewise, in 2 Corinthians 3, he shows that commending oneself is pointless. One's works, as attested to by the Spirit, are what makes a person's commendation knowable. As Christ is the judge of such things, whether they are truly Spirit-led or not, self-commendation is excluded -

"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you? ² You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³ clearly you are 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."
-2 Corinthians 3:1-3

Life application: In the book of Proverbs, we are given wise counsel concerning self-praise -

"Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth;
A stranger, and not your own lips." Proverbs 27:2

Instead of praising ourselves, let us walk in humility. Should we look for praise, let it be from the Lord. It is from Him that it truly matters.

Lord God, give us the desire to do Your work without looking for a pat on the back from others. And even more, keep us from self-commendation. We are not a very good standard by which to judge such things! Instead, help us to be content that the work we do for You will be rewarded with Your words of approval. May that wonderful anticipation be a sufficient reason for us to continue on for the sake of Your kingdom! Amen.

CHAPTER 11

Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.

2 Corinthians 11:1

Charles Ellicott's commentary on this verse is very insightful. He notes that -

"There are two catch-words, as it were, which characterize the section of the Epistle on which we are now entering: one is of 'bearing with,' or 'tolerating,' which occurs five times ... and 'folly,' which, with its kindred 'fool,' is repeated not less than eight times. ... It is impossible to resist the inference that here also we have the echo of something which Titus had reported to him as said by his opponents at Corinth. Their words, we must believe, had taken some such form as this: 'We really can bear with him no longer; his folly is becoming altogether intolerable.'"

This makes great sense because Paul seems to have been under great duress concerning his relationship with the Corinthians. By using their own words back at them, he places the responsibility for their belligerence back on them where it belongs, but by doing it this way he cannot be accused of speaking inappropriately towards them as he is using their own words.

Whether this analysis is correct or not, it still sums up the content of this verse very well. Paul is asking for them to bear with him in a little folly as he writes, knowing that there is already a sort of wall between them which necessitated his words.

Life application: Human interaction, either verbally or in writing, is a learned skill. Refining this skill so that one can anticipate the words of another and then using their words to redefine the interaction is a brilliant way of maintaining the upper hand while keeping harmony within the conversation. It is most difficult to argue against one's own words without looking belligerent in the conversation.

Lord, help us to carefully choose our words when we speak to others, especially during tense times where feelings could get hurt or anger could arise. Grant us the ability to stop and carefully evaluate the situation and then to open our mouths in a courteous and respectful way. May our words be used for edification and building up others, not for tearing them down. Thank You for being with us in this. Amen.

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:2

The "little folly" that Paul spoke of in the preceding verse begins to be revealed here. He tells his beloved church at Corinth that he is "jealous for you with godly jealousy." The word "jealous" is *zelo*. It is derived from the word *zeo* which means "to boil or be fervent." The action comes from the sound. When water boils, it makes the sound *zeo zeo zeo*. Likewise, the boiling water is fervent. This then corresponds to the emotion.

In this case, it is a positive fervency which he feels, even to the point that he stresses it with the words *Theo zelo*, or literally, "with a jealousy of God." There was nothing earthy and sensual in his jealousy, rather it was a heavenly, spiritual feeling which surpassed any earthy state. And he says his zeal is because "I have betrothed you to one husband."

The word for "betrothed" is found only here in the New Testament. It is *harmozó*. It gives the idea of betrothing a daughter to another. The word, though not found elsewhere in the NT, is found in Greek literature when speaking of the carpenter's work of joining boards together. It is also used in a musical sense, such as arranging music, tuning instruments, and even fitting together clothes or armor.

There is a harmony being brought together, one thing to another. In this case, it is to be as a bride to her bridegroom. Paul looked at himself as a father in their faith, having told them about Christ Jesus and having been there when they received Him. He is calling to remembrance his words of 1 Corinthians 4:15 -

"For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

It is he who will present his daughters in the faith to Christ. But more than just giving away a daughter, he desires her to be one who is pure and undefiled. His words show us this. He wanted their lives to be holy and their doctrine to be pure. As he says, "...so that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ." Albert Barnes, citing another scholar, explains the concept here -

"The allusion here, according to Doddridge, is, to the custom among the Greeks 'of having an officer whose business it was to educate and form young women, especially those of rank and figure, designed for marriage, and then to present them to those who were to be their husbands, and if this officer through negligence permitted them to be corrupted between the espousals and the consummation of the marriage, great blame would fall upon him.' Such a responsibility Paul felt. So anxious was he for the entire purity of that church which was to constitute 'the bride, the Lamb's wife;' so anxious that all who were connected with that church should be presented pure in heaven."

Paul felt the burden of ensuring that those in Corinth were properly trained in doctrine and that they would carry through with that training so that their lives would be dedicated to Christ and not to the things of the world. He uses similar terminology toward those in Ephesus as well -

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."

-Ephesians 5:25-27

Life application: From a biblical perspective, it is not enough to simply get people saved and on the path to heaven, but to mold them into purity as they continue on that path. Doctrine matters and its application matters as well. Let us consider where we will spend our time. Will it be in God's word or in pulp fiction? Will we go to a church that excludes doctrine in order to please, or to a church that holds the word of God in the highest esteem? It all matters and it bears on what our presentation to Christ will be like.

Lord God Almighty, I can see quite plainly in Your word that it isn't enough to simply get saved and start on a rambling path to Your presence. Instead, I can see that doctrine matters to You and that You would have us pursue Your superior word to the fullest and then apply its precepts to our lives. Help us not to get caught up in catchy-Christianity which has no substance, but instead to revel in pleasing You through the hard work of study and application of this precious gift. With this, I know You will be pleased. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 11:3

Following Paul's words to the Corinthians that he had "betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ," come almost anguished words. He begins with, "But I fear..." It is a future fear, meaning that what he is afraid of has not happened yet, but it looks like things are heading in that direction.

The words "lest somehow" give the idea that any possible means would be used to effect what Paul worries might come about. It may be a direct attack, or it might be a subtle flanking maneuver, or by some other means. However, what he is fearful about could come to pass. And the fear is that "as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted."

This is Paul's only direct allusion to the story of the serpent in Eden. It comes from Genesis 3, and he undoubtedly understood the serpent to be the devil, just as John so poignantly reveals in his writings. There in the garden, the serpent deceived Eve. She was prepared as a bride for Adam and yet she was corrupted through the devil's guile.

The analogy then is that the church is prepared as a bride for Christ, the last Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:45). But just as Eve was corrupted by the serpent, so the church could be "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

Adam and Eve were given one command, and yet through the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, they were drawn away into disobedience. In Christ we have also been given a means of remaining faithful which is simplicity itself. We are to believe the gospel. We are, in fact, saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

However, that simple message is so easily corrupted through the same three pressure points - the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Any of these, or a combination of them, will draw us away from the truth. Paul will continue to explain this in the verses ahead. He also explains it in a myriad of ways in his other letters. We are not to add to the gospel in any way. Instead, we are to understand that salvation is by grace through faith.

How easily our minds can be corrupted from this message though! Faith becomes a stumbling block because it seems too easy. And so, we add in works, we add in precepts, we add in a false Jesus.... whatever! The devil deceives us and pulls us away from Christ Jesus, misdirecting us to a false gospel, which is no gospel at all.

Life application: How silly we are to add to what being a true Christian is! Some say that if we don't support the nation of Israel, we are false Christians. That may be a point of sound doctrine, but it is not a point of salvation. Some say that we must observe the Sabbath or we are false Christians. That is reintroducing the law which was fulfilled in Christ. Thus, it sets aside the work of Christ. Whatever someone adds to the gospel, reject it. We are saved by grace through faith in the completed work of Christ - period!

Glorious God, Almighty Father, help us to be sound in our understanding of the gospel. Your word tells us that we are saved by grace through faith without any works added. Help us to trust this and not to get sidetracked by silly arguments which can only corrupt our minds and draw us away from the simplicity of the gospel that is in Christ. Right doctrine is important, but it is a follow-up to salvation by grace through faith. Help us to understand this. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! 2 Corinthians 11:4

"For if he" is singular. It is speaking of any individual who would come and proclaim a false Jesus. This gives illumination to Paul's words of Galatians 1 -

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." Galatians 1:6-8

A false Jesus is one not presented by the apostles, and the message of a false Jesus diverts from the truth of what God did in Christ. Even by this early date, there were countless heresies already springing up. Throughout the epistles, the truth of Christ is given to counter these falsities. With the Bible complete, we have the true and only source for doctrine concerning Christ. Any other, according to Paul, is "another Jesus whom we have not preached." There is orthodoxy, and then there is heresy. Doctrine matters.

Continuing on he writes, "...or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received." This is a separate thought from the one who preaches a false Jesus. It is speaking of a false inspiration. An example of such a false spirit is given by John -

"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world." 1 John 4:2, 3

Christian circles are literally filled to the brim with false spirits of inspiration. People claim all kinds of revelations from God which are untrue. The Bible is written, and further revelation would only confuse, not help, the message. Such claims should be rejected right away lest a seed of false teaching turn into a field of it.

In these first two clauses, "another Jesus" denies the identity of Christ, whereas a "different spirit" denies any similarity in nature. It is of the utmost importance that both are held to in matters concerning Christ.

Paul's words are poignant and direct, but he has yet more for us to consider. Not only are there false presentations of Jesus and false claims of inspiration, but there is also "a different gospel." The Corinthians had accepted Paul's words, but along comes another gospel which they had not accepted, and yet Paul was concerned that they "may well put up with it!"

There is one gospel which Paul consistently presents. We are saved by grace through faith; no works added. And yet at every turn people re-impose works of the law or add in externals, claiming that they are necessary in order to be saved. The gospel is a total and complete reliance on the work of Jesus Christ in fulfilling the law for us. In Him, it is finished; let us not attempt to tarnish His marvelous work through "a different gospel" which is no gospel at all.

Further, let us never even consider putting up with it. In his final words of the verse, the adverb translated as "well" is emphatic. Paul's words drip with irony. They were willing to follow a false gospel, but they were resistant to continue in the message which they had first received from him. It shows a confusion of mind and a sense of self-pride that had replaced a total dependence on Christ. Instead, they were ready to accept a false Christ whose works were incomplete, a false spirit which was sensational and exciting to listen to, and a false gospel which says, "I have helped out in my own salvation."

Life application: Let us learn the lesson of Paul's words here and hold fast to the truth of the Person of Jesus Christ, the reliability and surety of God's word as our source of inspiration, and to the sound and reasonable gospel which says that Christ has done it all for us. His work is a gift from God. Let us not taint the gift in any way.

Heavenly Father, I rely solely on the merits of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.

2 Corinthians 11:5

This verse from Paul almost exudes anger at having to defend his apostleship to those whom he introduced to Christ. In Galatians 1, he had been given the right hand of fellowship by James, Cephas, and John - the chief apostles at Jerusalem. When Peter came to Antioch, Paul had actually rebuked him for straying from the truth of the gospel. In Acts 15, Paul was granted full support for his ministry by the Council at Jerusalem both in writing and with accompanied witnesses to travel with him.

His apostleship was fully attested to and yet it was being challenged by "the most eminent apostles." Here he is not speaking of the true apostles, but by those who claimed to be apostles, but were false. He speaks of them again in verse 13, describing them in a most negative light.

The word he uses, which is translated here as "most eminent apostles," is unique and strange. One scholar translates this as "extra super apostles" to show the almost laughable way that Paul viewed them. His words show the depth of his emotion over this matter. Those in Corinth had compared his true apostleship to that of a false one, and they had found the false one more appealing.

For him to have to say "I consider that I am not at all inferior" to them was obviously something deeply hurtful.

Life application: Having sound doctrine is obviously important. If Paul had to face challenges to his apostolic authority because others were coming and polluting the simplicity of the gospel, how much more should we be careful and attentive to this now that we have the entire Bible to learn and apply? Do we suppose that we can have a right relationship with the Lord apart from the very word He has given? Watch out for false teachings that come as people twist and manipulate the word for their own vile purposes.

Heavenly Father, I'm not sure what prompts people to present false information concerning You and Your word - money, power, status? Whatever reason it is, it is heartbreaking to consider that they will tear people away from You who are unwilling to study Your word, preparing themselves for such wolves. I pray that folks will place a high value on this most precious gift You have given us in order to keep from being led astray. Amen.

Even though *I am* untrained in speech, yet *I am* not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. 2 Corinthians 11:6

In the previous verse, he said that he was "not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles." This was a jab at those false apostles, not the real ones. From this verse, we can deduce that they were those who came and spoke with great eloquence. On the contrary, Paul admits that he is "untrained in speech." The word for "untrained" is *idiótés*. It is a word which has morphed into our own language as "idiot." However, at the time and according to Helps Word Studies, it meant "properly, of one's *own self*;

used of a person who *conspicuously* lacks education or status – hence, easily misunderstood as being uninstructed (unrefined, 'unlettered in speech')."

Paul admits that his speech is lacking the grace of those who came to woo the Corinthians away from him. He was born and raised in Tarsus, and it may be that the Greek he learned was less refined than it could have been. Or it could be that he simply lacked eloquence through a stutter or a slow mental process which was more concerned about precision than oration. Whatever the reason, he notes that though this might be the case with his speech, "yet *I am* not in knowledge."

Paul was well trained in the law, having studied under Gamaliel. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees and had all of the knowledge of the law to be considered the most schooled of Jews. Further, he had personal revelation from Jesus Christ concerning the church and the calling of the Gentiles. In no way was his knowledge lacking. It is a point which was of far more value than a highly eloquent and polished tongue.

From this verse, we can see that these false apostles were of the same breed as those who stood and listened to Peter and John speak in Acts 4. A similar thought is mentioned about them -

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13

History has borne this assessment of Paul out. Studying his writings seems to show that His Greek was less-cultured than one might expect of such a great mind. As Albert Barnes notes -

"Critics profoundly acquainted with the Greek language remark, that while there is great energy of thought and of diction in the writings of Paul; while he chooses or coins most expressive words, yet that there is everywhere a lack of Attic elegance of manner, and of the smoothness and beauty which were so grateful to a Grecian ear."

Regardless of this lack of smoothness and beauty, it is the substance behind his words which truly matters. With his great knowledge he notes that "we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things." Those in Corinth had received Christ through him and his fellow apostles. They had received training in Christ after that. The questions which had been raised had been fully answered. In all ways, the effort and work of Paul

was made manifest to the fullest measure in them. The humble tent maker sewed more into his disciples than he did into linen or leather.

Life application: A lack of eloquence doesn't necessarily mean a lack of knowledge. In fact, one who has precision of thought may actually lack in smooth speech, being more concerned about being correct than being graceful to the ear.

Lord God Almighty, You have fashioned each one of us according to Your wisdom. It is true that we can learn and grow as individuals, but the basic structure of who we are comes from You. So why should we worry about our limitations or failings in one area or another? You have given us strengths according to Your plan and so help us to be content with them. We exist as we are because of You! Thank You for Your infinitely wise hand which has so carefully fashioned us. Amen.

Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? 2 Corinthians 11:7

The transition from the previous verse seems abrupt, but it isn't really. Paul is displaying irony in the contrast -

⁶"Even though *I am* untrained in speech, yet *I am* not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. ⁷Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?" (vs 6-7)

After showing that he is trained in knowledge, he asks, "Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted?" In essence, "Am I lacking knowledge in what denotes sin?" Obviously such is not the case, but his actions had been challenged in this way. He humbled himself by working with his own hands in the trade of tentmaker so that those in Corinth would be elevated above himself. His job was lowly, tedious, and not one which made a great deal of money.

If someone came to the church and saw him, they would say, "There is that lowly tentmaker." In this, the rest of the congregation would seem like much more honorable citizens in whatever job they had. This is evident because he finishes with, "...because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge."

If the same person came in and saw Paul, knowing that he was a paid preacher, then he would be elevated in the congregation. This is always the case. A person who is paid by

the crowd for his talents, be it an actor or a faith healer, is always universally perceived as exalted and worthy of respect. Paul chose not to exercise his rights to pay and honor, but rather to allow those around him to be elevated above him.

It seems that his detractors found it inappropriate that he didn't charge for his services in sharing the gospel. This accusation could have been made in a couple of different ways -

- They may have said that anyone who had a sound message was worth the wages of his labors. Because Paul failed to receive pay from the Corinthians, he proved his own lack of true value. Or,
- It could be that because Paul accepted pay from other churches (such as the Macedonians noted in verse 9), but not from those in Corinth, it was demeaning to the Corinthians. It has already been noted that the Macedonians were impoverished (2 Corinthians 8:2) and so those at Corinth may infer that Paul is actually shaming toward them by taking from a poor group but refusing pay from them.

It seems that no matter what avenue Paul chose, his detractors would find fault in his actions.

Life application: It is not demeaning to take a lower position than one which a person is otherwise entitled to. In fact, it is a precept which Jesus taught and which He also lived out. Be cautious to not find fault in others when they are willing to show humility. It is a trait which God approves of throughout His word.

Lord God, thank You for those leaders who act with humility and who are willing to associate with those around them, rather than distancing themselves from the crowd. It is a rare trait in this world that our leaders, whether spiritual, political, or work-related, are willing to not exalt themselves. Those who do are following the greatest example of all - Christ, who humbled Himself and walked among us, lowly sinners. Help each of us to have the same attitude towards those around us. Amen.

I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you.

2 Corinthians 11:8

In his previous words, Paul noted that he preached the gospel "free of charge" to those at Corinth. However, he now tells them that he didn't preach without any type of earnings. Rather, he says that "I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to

minister to you." The word he uses for "robbed" is used only here in the New Testament. It means "to plunder" as if in exercising a "right of seizure," like spoils in war.

This is said then in an ironic rather than a literal fashion. Other churches had helped him out and he used what they had given him as he spread the gospel to live on. By so doing, he was able to preach at Corinth "free of charge." Whereas they received the message without paying him, others were despoiled at their expense.

This is the purpose of a mission budget. Those who give to a traveling minister do so knowing that they are being "robbed" in order for that minister to freely assist others. Hence, for "taking wages" Paul uses the term *opsōnion*. It comes from *opson*, meaning "meat" and *onemoai*, meaning "purchase." It is that which allows one to buy meat (food). From that it came to be considered "ration-money paid to soldiers."

It is this idea that he had in mind. He was, as it were, a soldier who was in a spiritual battle and his wages were for that purpose. Although it is not sure which churches he is referring to, in his letter to the Philippians he notes that at least they had helped him in his spiritual conquest -

"Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities." Philippians 4:15, 16

Life application: The laborer is worthy of his wages. Be sure to openly and freely assist those who tirelessly work in their duties to bring the message of Christ, and the explanation of His word, to others. If your income is used to help bring this message to others, does it matter if it is in Kansas or Kuala Lumpur?

Lord God, it sure is wonderful to know that Your precious gospel message is still being carried around the world. From Sarasota, Florida to Shinjuku, Japan and from Kalamazoo, Michigan to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia it is being preached. Throughout this world of Yours, faithful souls are sharing the good news and teaching Your word. Please send a blessing upon them and let them know that their efforts are not in vain. Thank You for guiding Your word, even to the ends of the world! Amen.

And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep *myself*. 2 Corinthians 11:9

Paul continues on with his defense of not being less than the "eminent apostles" (meaning the false apostles) of verse 5. In his conduct, he noted that he has preached the gospel "free of charge." Further, in an ironic fashion, he noted that he "robbed other churches" in order to minister to the Corinthians.

Now he reminds them that when he was there with them and yet was in need, he "was a burden to no one." The term "in need" is an aorist present participle which shows that his need was temporary rather than long term. In other words, he had a temporary crisis in which he needed assistance. And yet, he never burdened the Corinthians.

The word for "I was a burden" is *katenarkesa*. It is only used by Paul and only three times in this epistle. It is a very rare word which gives the idea of numbness or deadness. It is connected to the torpedo fish which makes anything it touches numb. Jerome ranks the words as one of Paul's cilicisms (a word picked up by Paul in his hometown of Cilicia). Thus, it is a provincial expression. The intent is that even though he was present with the Corinthians, he asked for nothing which would numb them to his ministry.

Rather than asking for a single thing from them which might turn them from listening to his words about the gospel, he says that "for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied." They had already been evangelized and, therefore, his asking for help from them would not affect their acceptance of the gospel. Rather than being a snub to the Corinthians, he is showing that there is a time and a place for receiving help. He felt it was not the time for it while he was ministering to them.

And so, he says, "...in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you." Because of his desire to keep the situation with those in Corinth on a purely gospel-oriented level, he decided that he would in no way burden them. But he also adds in his final words of, "...and so I will keep *myself*." This may be a slight rebuke towards them. He has been addressing the issue of the false apostles and he will continue to do so.

In saying that he will continue to keep himself and not burden the Corinthians, it may be that he is telling them, "I am still teaching you. You have not yet learned to discern right from wrong. If I start receiving aid from you, then you might think that I am actually a false apostle, looking for a handout rather than being willing to assist you in receiving and growing in the gospel."

Life application: Love displays itself differently towards different people. We should not look at how a pastor or teacher treats one person and think that he loves another any

less because he responds to them differently. Just as each child in a home has different needs and is treated in a different way, so it is in any setting. The same amount of love can be given to everyone, but how it is displayed must be individually directed.

Most precious heavenly Father! We are filled with thanks to You today. You have given each of us so many blessings and we are overflowing with the abundance. Even when we are in times of need, the blessings outweigh the needs ten-thousand-fold. Help us to never forget that every touch of a loved one, every breath of air, and each moment that ticks by on time's clock is a gift from You. These and so much more are grace. We thank You for the abundance and we rejoice in it! Thank You, O God of all blessing! Amen.

As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. 2 Corinthians 11:10

Paul invokes the name of Christ in the adamancy of his words. "As the truth of Christ is in me..." He uses the same general formula in Romans 9:1 as well -

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit..."

The thought he is presenting is that because he must answer to Christ alone, his words are to be taken as truthful. "I could no more change my mind about this matter than tell a lie to Christ." And the thought which he is adamant about is that "no one shall stop me from this boasting."

The "boasting" is what he has been referring to in the previous verses. It is that he has preached the message of Christ without charge to the Corinthians or otherwise been burdensome to them in any way. He would continue to conduct himself in this manner towards them. The word for "shall stop" means properly "to fence in" or "enclose." In turn, it then conveys the idea of "to stop, blocking something off so that it cannot spread or get out of hand."

Paul had determined that nothing would fence in his desire to work without any type of compensation for his labors from those in Corinth. However, instead of singling them out, he says, "in the regions of Achaia." Here he uses the word *klima*, which is a word uniquely used by him in the New Testament. It began as a scientific term which eventually became a colloquialism. It is where we get our word "climate" from. In this case, it identifies a larger area than just Corinth, meaning Achaia, probably because he

was including the church in Cenchrea, and any other churches connected to those at Corinth.

Life application: In Paul's words, he is not making an oath concerning his intent. Rather, he is saying that as he is a follower of Christ, and as Christ cannot be lied to, then his words should obviously remain truthful, lest he be perceived as even attempting to lie to Him. We can see that there is nothing wrong with such a statement. However, if we make one similar to it, we had better be telling the truth. If we are not, then we have disgraced the name of Christ to others and we have proven that the name of the very Lord who we have called on doesn't have any true value to us.

Heavenly Father, help us to be people of integrity that others will see and say, "I know that person can be trusted." As we bear the name of Your Son, what kind of followers of Him would we be if we were known to willfully cheat, steal, or lie? What value would Your name really be if others knew that we were willing to sacrifice it for falsehood? Be with us and guide us, always remembering our position as followers of Christ. Amen.

Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! 2 Corinthians 11:11

His last statement said, "As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia." In response to this, he asks the question, "Why?" He then rhetorically questions, "Because I do not love you?"

The exchange is given because those in Corinth may have felt this way. By rejecting any favors from them, at least a portion of them may have felt snubbed. But it is not necessarily true that turning down help or aid means that someone doesn't care about the giver. They had read into his heart a condition which did not exist.

Paul had evaluated the congregations in Achaia and had seen that the best interaction concerning receiving gifts from them was to restrain from doing so. They were spiritually weak, and they were doctrinally confused. They also allowed outsiders who had ill intent for them to sway them away from the truth in Christ. Paul knew that if he were to receive assistance from them, even this would have turned into an unhappy issue at some point.

He doesn't say any of this to them, but it is evident from the content of both epistles to them. But does this mean that he didn't love them? In response to such a question, he says, "God knows!" They may not have been able to tell, but God could. Paul had a deep

passion for the churches in Achaia and he struggled to bring them to maturity in their faith. It was a sure evidence of his great love for them.

Life application: We can learn from Paul's care of those in Corinth that it is acceptable to treat different individuals and different congregations differently. We need to evaluate the best approach to dealing with others in order to cause the least amount of conflict later down the line. However, even our best intents can be misunderstood and lead to conflicts and confusions. Life is messy; let us do our best to work through it by relying on the most excellent guidelines available. Let us know and apply the precepts in the Bible to our daily interactions with others.

Heavenly Father, at times it sure is difficult to know what the best avenue to take is. It seems that no matter what choice we make, someone is there to question our sincerity, our integrity, or our love towards those who are affected by what we decide to do. Help us to remember to daily seek Your wisdom first, through Bible study and through prayer. In so doing, Your guidance will certainly be with us as we interact with the world around us. Help us in this and be with us always. Thank You, O God. Amen.

But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. 2 Corinthians 11:12

"But what I do" refers to Paul's conduct towards the Corinthians thus far. He has been preaching and teaching them for free and he has laid no burden on them of any sort. In this conduct, he says that "I will also continue to do." He would remain steadfast in his determination that he would preach and teach those in Corinth without receiving any remuneration at all.

To him, this was a most important aspect of his ministry to them because he desired to "cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast." It is a lot of words to convey his thoughts, but they are selected in order to be precise.

What is obvious is that these false apostles were coming to Corinth under the guise of preaching without receiving any payment in order to lull the Corinthians away from Paul and from the truth of the gospel. However, their guise was not sincere. They were actually interested in compensation even though they claimed they were not. Paul shows that their attitude was exactly the opposite of the truth of the matter. In fact, in 1

Corinthians 9:12, it is implied that others had been paid by the Corinthians for their ministry.

One can almost see the hypocritical way they came to preach. They would arrive and say that they were there to serve the church. Quickly but subtly, they would introduce a little yeast to misdirect the faith that they had received through Paul. When offered money for their "enlightened" teaching, they would refuse it while saying that they were only there to help. However, when offered a second time, they would say, "Well, if you insist..."

In the end, they could claim that they came freely teaching the gospel, but at the same time, they could continue to receive pay because of their initial refusal. Paul on the other hand determined that he would continue to not receive anything from the Corinthians to prove that his intentions were pure and undefiled.

Life application: Smooth operators abound in Christian circles. Be wary of those who would put forward a foot of piety but who are actually stepping forward to rob the unsuspecting.

Glorious God, help my heart to be pure and undefiled as I come to Your word. Don't let me get caught up in a case of picking and choosing what verses I will accept or reject. And Lord, keep me from unsound teachers who are bent on twisting Your word to fit this world instead of showing that our world needs to comply with Your word. Grant me the wisdom to understand when I am being led down an unsound path by those who have a twisted agenda. Keep me on the straight and narrow path to Jesus! Amen.

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:13

Paul enters into one of his most direct statements concerning the nature of those who would stealthily enter in and introduce a false gospel. He holds nothing back as he first calls them "false apostles." They had no commission from Jesus; they had no power of the Spirit granted to them; and their words did not confirm either previously given Scripture, nor did they conform to the gospel of Christ which had come. Instead of the all-sufficiency of Christ, they certainly claimed more was necessary to be saved.

He also called them "deceitful workers." A worker receives wages for his work. If he is honest, then the wages he receives will be commensurate with his output. However, these people cheated in their works. Rather than striving for Christ, they made stuff up

out of their own heads. Rather than laboring in the gospel, they labored in the devil's work. And instead of promoting Christ, they promoted self while claiming they were promoting Christ.

They changed their outward appearance by "transforming themselves into apostles of Christ." Their inward selves remained however, and nothing of Christ indwelt them. Paul's strong language here is comparable to that of 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 -

"For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, ¹⁶ forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of* their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost."

He also had similar strong words for such people when writing to those in Philippi -

"Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh..." Philippians 3:2, 3

Jesus also speaks of such false apostles -

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars..." Revelation 2:2

From Paul's words later in verse 22, we can discern that these false apostles at Corinth were Jews. There he asks, "...are they Hebrews?" when comparing himself to them. It is apparent from these references that these people are the "most eminent apostles" he spoke of in verse 5, and that they were a cunningly devised, but false, representation of true workers for the Lord.

Life application: The truth is that these types of false workers haven't gone away. The world is filled with those who are false and whose message is tainted with deceit. But it takes knowledge of Scripture to be able to identify and then refute them. Unfortunately, most people don't want to spend the effort to get to know their Bible. It is so much

easier to blindly trust a smooth sounding orator and be lulled into misdirection. Paul warns against this, and we should pay heed to his words!

Lord God, the apostles of Christ, and even Christ Himself, identify false apostles and teachers who secretly creep in and introduce their counterfeit teachings and heretical doctrines. But how can we know who they are unless we know Your word? There are so many fine sounding preachers and teachers who introduce a little yeast into the bread of our doctrine and pull us away from the truth. Help us Lord to hold Your word in high esteem and be willing to search it out for the truth it contains. Keep us from false teachers and false doctrines. Amen.

And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

2 Corinthians 11:14

In the previous verse, Paul spoke of the "false apostles" as those who would transform themselves into apostles of Christ. Now he says, "And no wonder!" This then shows why they do this. It is because they are just like their leader, Satan, who "transforms himself into an angel of light." The verb is in the present tense and so this is not speaking of any specific incident found in Scripture. Rather, it is speaking of his customary way of working at all times.

He is an enemy of all that is good, and the titles used to describe him in the New Testament show that his very nature is evil. And yet, he presents himself as a shining example of what is proper and correct. The term "angel of light" indicates purity and holiness. However, if he supposedly "transforms himself" into this, then it is a false representation of who he is. It is not his true nature, but a cunning disguise which is intended to lure the unsuspecting away from the truth.

This then is the explanation of the false apostles' conduct of the preceding verse. They follow in form and style with their leader, Satan. This transformation is found in the message that is presented, in the twisting of the truth, in the perversion of Scripture, in attributing the works of wickedness to that which is of God, etc.

It is incumbent on all people to study the word in order to show themselves approved when a false teacher, or even the devil himself, comes with a false message. But how impossible that is without knowing the word! And so, the world is filled with cults, heresies, and those who follow after anyone with a crazy vision or a supposed "word from the Lord" which is no word at all. Satan uses all of these avenues, and ten

thousand more, to lure away precious souls from the grace of Christ the Lord to another gospel, which is no gospel at all.

Paul carefully warns us of such deception in Galatians 1 –

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." Galatians 1:6-9

Life application: To avoid being deceived by the devil, know your Bible.

Lord God, Your word tells us that Satan is real and that he transforms himself into an angel of light to deceive us from the truth. And so how can we know if we are being duped by this bad dude? We have to know Your word! If this is a battle between good and evil and Your word gives us the framework for the conflict, then we would be as dull as ditchwater to not want to know and apply Your word to our lives. Help us to not be as dull as ditchwater. Amen.

Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. 2 Corinthians 11:15

The train of thought thus far is that the false apostles Paul has been speaking of are actually deceitful workers who transform themselves into apostles of Christ. And this is actually unsurprising because Satan himself has to transform himself into an angel of light to hide his true nature. Because their father, the devil, does this "it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness."

In other words, just as Satan's true nature is hidden behind a false show of light, so it is with these false apostles in that their true nature is hidden behind a false display of righteousness. In fact, they certainly claim a greater righteousness than Christ because they insert works of the law and other external displays of righteousness to their theology. In doing this, they say that what Christ did, and the righteousness He imputes to His followers, is insufficient for their salvation.

It is a subtle but direct attack against the work of Christ. The gospel says that the Lord is our righteousness. We are saved by faith in His work. In turn for having our sin nailed to the cross, He bestows upon us His righteousness. Therefore, anyone who says that we must add to salvation by grace through faith alone is claiming a greater righteousness than that of Christ. As this is impossible, it is a self-condemning act. For this, their "end will be according to their works."

What this means is that because their works are false, because their works pervert the gospel, and because their works are what they stand on, then they will be judged by their works and not by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Imagine the horror they will feel when they see how filthy their supposed righteousness truly is when they stand before pure and undefiled righteousness!

Life application: In what do you trust for your salvation? If you say anything other than, "The shed blood of Christ" you have missed the mark. Nothing can wash away the defilement of man except His cross. And nothing can grant us the righteousness we need to stand before God except His work, imputed to us.

Lord God, the Bible says that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and that no man may come to You apart from Him. It then says that we are saved by grace through faith and not works of any kind. And so, if someone tells us that we need to do something more than simply believe and receive, they are saying that they have a greater righteousness than Christ. I think not. Instead, I will stand on the merits of Christ my Lord. No Plan-B here. Hallelujah for Jesus! Amen and amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 11:16

Paul has already diverted into a need for boasting on several occasions. He did so in 2 Corinthians 10:8, and he again did so in verse 1 of this chapter, of which this statement is a general repeat of that thought, hence the words "I say again." In verse 1, he said -

"Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me."

The words, "I say again, let no one think me a fool" are given concerning his boasting. Even if he commends himself, it should not be thought of as a fool's boasting, but as a necessary part of his defense against the false apostles. Continuing on, his words add in

sarcasm. He says, "If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool." In other words, "If boasting makes me a fool, then receive me as a fool, so 'that I also may boast a little.'"

The words "a little" show that he is asking for their tolerance in his minimal boasting, and in things that are true about himself. This is to be taken as sarcastically contrasting a great and untruthful boasting of the false apostles. In essence, "You have put up with a lot of foolish and false boasting by those 'extra-super apostles,' and so please put up with just a dab of truthful boasting from me."

He is not claiming that he is a fool for boasting, but if that is how he is perceived in order to defend his apostleship, then so be it.

Life application: Paul goes to great lengths to defend the truth of the gospel. It is a good lesson for us to follow through with as well. And yet, there is a time when we have to step back, shake the dust off our feet, and move on. Be patient, be kind, and be firm. Speak the truth in season and out.

Lord God, help us in our faith. Help us to be firm and unyielding in the truths which are taught in Your word and to never give in to the forces of immorality, perversion, and wickedness all around us. If our leaders, both in government and in the apostate church, want to use a diving board to jump into hell, as it seems they intend to do, it is certain that they will attempt to weaken our faith as well. May it not be so! Keep us on the straight and narrow path to You. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and our actions in line with Your word. Amen.

What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. 2 Corinthians 11:17

This verse is one which calls out for a deep analysis of it concerning the inspiration of Scripture. The Bible is believed to be the full and complete revelation of God to humanity. It is of Divine origin, and yet it is also of human origin. Man, under inspiration of God, penned what he was led to pen. However, at the same time, man's thoughts, his style, his heart – all of this is included in the books of the Bible.

In this verse, Paul says, "What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord." And so, the question is, "Are these words inspired by God or not?" Albert Barnes gives two options concerning the matter –

“The phrase here may mean either, I do not speak this by inspiration or claiming to be inspired by the Lord; or more probably it may mean, I do not speak this imitating the example of the Lord Jesus or strictly as becomes his follower.”

To say that the first is true means that this portion of the Bible is not inspired. From this springboard, men could begin to slice and dice; to pick and choose; and to disregard and neglect any portion of the Bible that they personally felt lacked inspiration. Such happens all the time among liberal scholars, and it turns the Bible into a book of personal theology rather than God-directed theology.

Rather, Paul’s writings are inspired, even verses such as this one. The Lord allowed him to speak his heart and show that his words were not according to an imitation of the Lord, and yet his words are a necessary part of the interaction between him and the Corinthians for us to properly understand God-directed theology. Instead of emulating how the Lord would handle this matter, being the perfect God, Paul says that he speaks “not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.”

Being fallen beings and filled with imperfections, we necessarily handle God-directed matters within those limitations. Paul was doing just that. Unlike Jesus who had no such limitations, he did. And so, in order to make an example for those at Corinth to understand, he used his limitations (this confidence of boasting), to show them where they were wrong in their thinking.

His admission that his example was not in accordance with a perfect emulation of the Lord was carefully chosen and built upon to inform the Corinthians (and thus us!) that their own boasting was a much larger diversion from proper emulation of the Lord. In other words, Paul is saying, “I am giving you an example of myself by diverting from what the Lord would do in order to show you that what you are doing is the same, but on a much larger scale.”

This is Paul’s way of correcting their deficiency. At the same time, it is a Spirit-led example. God is using Paul’s deficiency, just as He used those of all of His prophets and apostles in the writing of His book. Moses’ failings are carefully recorded from his time at the burning bush in Exodus 3, even unto his striking the Rock at Meribah in Numbers 20. As one reads the Bible, such deficiencies are seen permeating its pages. Think of Jonah! The Pulpit Commentary beautifully describes Paul’s human frailty which is still used in the inspired word of God –

“‘Boasting,’ or what might be stigmatized as such, may become a sort of painful necessity, necessitated by human baseness; but in itself it cannot be ‘after the Lord.’ There is nothing Christ-like in it. It is human, not Divine; an earthly necessity, not a heavenly example; a sword of the giant Philistine, which yet David may be forced to use.”

Life application: The human frailties of the authors of the Bible in no way diminish the inspiration of it. In fact, they are necessary elements of inspiration in order for us to understand how far we actually depart from God. Don't let any liberal teaching mislead you away from the truth that all Scripture is divinely inspired. It is. Cling to this truth as you see your own failings represented in the failings of its human authors. And then understand that God can and will use you just as you are as you pursue Him.

Heavenly Father, it is amazing to see the human failings of the authors of the Bible on prominent display. And yet, You used those shortcomings to show us how to better respond to the world around us and to show us of our own need to rely on You in order to become like You. Thank You that Your Divine word includes our human frailties. Because of them, we can know that You can use us as well, fallen and broken. And in the process, You are able to correct us and mold us more and more into Your glorious image. O God, how great Thou art! Amen.

Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. 2 Corinthians 11:18

Paul is showing the irony of the situation. In verse 12, he noted the boasting of the false apostles. Those at Corinth had been swayed by them in this boasting; a boasting of the flesh. Now Paul says that if the flesh is what impresses them, he too has the ability to impress based on the flesh, and so he will boast in it.

Before he does, he will give a few more notes of irony concerning their relationship with the false apostles, and he will show how he is contrasted to them. After that, he will provide a detailed and hearty list of his qualifications and his efforts on behalf of the gospel. If boasting in the flesh is what impresses them, then he would give them what they desired.

Paul's boasting in the flesh provides us with an exacting description of who he is and the things he has done. From this list we have a record to refer to in order to know him on a much more intimate level. His coming words have become a most important aspect of Christian theology and doctrine. From this mere "boasting" of Paul we can find out how to conduct our own lives and where to turn in our own distresses.

What seems uninspired on the surface is actually a most important part of learning to deal with life and our relationship with the Lord. The hand of God's inspiration is all over it.

Life application: The Lord reveals things to us in the most marvelous of ways. As you read the Bible and come to some passage which is seemingly irrelevant, stop and reconsider it. In the end, if it is from God, it must be of great importance. The Bible is a book about the same size as many others, and yet it took centuries to write as God methodically chose real moments in time and in human experience to reveal His heart to us.

Heavenly Father, as we contemplate Your word, help us to remember that it is something that You spent many centuries compiling for us. You used real circumstances, in the lives of real people, to slowly reveal to us Your very heart. Every single passage must then have the highest importance for us to consider and apply to our lives and to our doctrine. Help us to consider this precious gift for what it is - a letter of love from You to us. Thank You for Your precious and superior word! Amen.

For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! 2 Corinthians 11:19

The words of this verse are parallel to those of 2 Corinthians 4:10 -

"We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but you *are* wise in Christ!"

However, the words here contain far more irony, ranking as the epitome of Paul's sarcastic attempts to instill reason into the Corinthians. "For you put up with fools gladly" is Paul's way of calling himself a fool. This is based on the previous verse. Taken together, they read, "Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly."

In essence, he is saying that his boasting is a foolish attempt to get them to recognize his status according to a fleshly nature. If that is what impresses them, then he will break down his fleshly achievements, proving that he is the cream of the crop in worldly attainments. In so doing this, they will have to put up with great foolishness!

In contrast to this are his scathingly sarcastic words, "...since you *yourselves* are wise!" This shows that their "wisdom" is to bear with foolishness. It is a contradiction that he is openly highlighting to show how silly it is that they would put up with the boasting of the false apostles. In his words here and to follow, it is Paul's intent to show them that

the flesh and the ways of the world mean nothing. Instead, all that matters is Christ and His gospel.

Life application: As soon as we elevate a teacher, a preacher, or a TV evangelist to any level of importance, we actually tread into dangerous waters. Who is it that we are following, a person or the message? If the message, then the person should not be elevated. If he is, then the message, either sound or false, becomes a secondary issue.

Lord God, Heavenly Father - Grant us the wisdom to think clearly and correctly about matters of faith. Help us to not get caught up in the idolizing of personalities who teach the Bible, but to keep our allegiance to You pure and undefiled. If we get excited about an individual, then if his message is wrong, we may miss the error in it. Instead, help us to follow Your word alone. Remind us daily that doctrine matters and that all else is secondary. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 11:20

Paul had just mentioned that the Corinthians were "wise" because they "put up with fools." To show them their level of wisdom, he ironically shows them their dullness. His words here are reflective of the attitude of the Pharisees towards those around them in Israel, a concept with which Paul was eminently familiar, having come from their ranks. First, he says to them that "you put up with it if one brings you into bondage." This is what the Lord said the Pharisees did to the Israelites -

"For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers." Matthew 23:4

They brought them into bondage, as if they were oxen required to carry their heavy burdens of legalism. The false teachers were there in Corinth, doing exactly the same thing. They were adding to the simplicity of the gospel. Paul continues with, "...if one devours you." Jesus told the Pharisees they were doing just this -

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation." Matthew 23:14

In their greed for power and money, the supposedly pious class of Pharisees devoured those around them, robbing from them even the homes they lived in. The false teachers

were no different. They came in with piety and consumed like lions. Continuing on, he says, "...if one takes *from you*." Jesus noted the same trait among the Pharisees -

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence."

-Matthew 23:25

The Pharisees extorted from those around them in order to feed their own self-indulgence. The false apostles were obviously doing the same thing to the Corinthians. Titus had been there and had certainly reported to Paul all that he saw going on. Adding on to the charges against them, he next says, "...if one exalts himself." Jesus noted the same trait in the Pharisees -

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Matthew 23:27, 28

The Pharisees exalted themselves in outward beauty and in outward righteousness. But it was a mere facade. The same was true with the false apostles who came to Corinth. They looked marvelous, but they were full of corruption. To finish the verse, Paul says, "...if one strikes you on the face." This is exactly what Jesus' accusers did in Luke 22:64 and what happened to Paul in Acts 23:2. Likewise, the false apostles came in and had wielded such strong authority over the Corinthians that they had either literally or figuratively done the same to them.

Life application: Legalism always leads to the demeaning of those who are brought into its strong hold. Knowing your Bible is the only way to avoid being trapped by its heavy bonds.

Heavenly Father, I pray for those who are caught up in the bonds of legalism. "Don't touch! Don't taste! Don't do this! You must do that!" Lord, if people would just learn the truth of Your word, they wouldn't be caught up in such bondage. Help us to understand the freedoms as well as the expectations which come as followers of You. Help us to stand on what is right in accordance with Your word, and Your word alone. Amen.

To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also. 2 Corinthians 11:21

In the preceding verses, Paul noted that the Corinthians had put up with fools who brought them into bondage, devoured them, stolen from them, exalted themselves above them, and even struck them in the face. Paul now says that “To *our* shame I say that we were too weak for that!” The “we” is emphatic and is intended with the greatest of irony. In essence, “They treated you shamefully, but we were too weak to be able to treat you in that same way.”

The irony is that no one should ever treat one they love that way and so his “weakness” was that he treated them with respect and love. And yet, the Corinthians were turning their hearts to the ones who shamefully treated them and away from their loving father in the faith.

However, to show that he really isn’t weak, but that his conduct was appropriate, he continues on with the words, “But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.” The word “bold” is translated various ways – daring, courageous, to presume, to boast. The idea is a type of boasting in his many achievements, some of which were more than daring. This will be seen in the explanation that follows.

In his foolish speaking, he will describe his qualifications to show that he is not only comparable to them in their boasting, but that he is eminently qualified. Starting in the next verse, and going on through verse 10 of the next chapter, he will list those qualifications. It is a foolish endeavor, yes, but it is one which has been necessitated by the attitude of the Corinthians towards the false teachers. If they need to have someone to follow who can boast about his qualifications, then they will get a mouthful from Paul!

Life application: It is right to be humble and not bragging about one’s own achievements, but Paul shows that there is a time when it becomes necessary to show past achievements in order to establish a baseline for others to understand the quality of the man. This doesn’t mean unnecessary boasting, but rather it may be as simple as providing proof that you can empathize with the plight of others because you have been in the same place as they are. When necessary, be ready to use your past to help others properly evaluate the world around them.

Heavenly Father, help keep me from unnecessary boasting in my achievements. Should revealing my past be necessary for others to understand who I am or my qualifications in whatever issue arises, help me to return the glory to You for having placed me where I was in order to become who I am now. My life has been directed by You, and so help me

to acknowledge that truth at all times. Keep me from self-boasting and the pride which so easily misdirects my allegiance to You. Amen.

Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. 2 Corinthians 11:22

In Paul's "boasting" out his defense against his accusers, he now contrasts himself with them. What is evident is that they matched each of these things that he will now describe, and they boasted of their status because of it to the Corinthians. They claimed a special right and status because of this heritage and therefore they were more worthy to be listened to and followed. Be advised that nothing has changed today. As you read these words, know that the exact same arguments are used by the exact same category of people to sway others to their own misguided use of Scripture.

He begins with, "Are they Hebrews?" This points to the special status of those who have "crossed over," which is what the term Hebrew implies. They thus claimed the cultural privilege of being of this pure stock. They were probably born and raised in the land of Israel, spoke the Hebrew language, and read the Scriptures in that language. In contrast, they would claim that Paul was merely a knock-off of this pure line who mostly used the Greek translation of the Scriptures and who was born outside of the land of Israel.

However, Paul defended his status as a Hebrew. He was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5). He was born to Hebrews who were born in the land. He could rightfully claim that he descended from the same pure line. He also was trained under Gamliel and knew the Hebrew Scriptures in the original language. Just because he was born in Tarsus in no way affected his pure genealogy. Rather, it gave him something more than they possessed because he could unite the pure doctrine of the Hebrews with the languages and experiences of the world beyond Israel. Thus, he was more qualified than they were to bring the message to the Gentiles. In essence, Jesus made no mistake in His selection. He was no knock-off but was rather eminently qualified to be called a "Hebrew." Thus, his words, "So *am* I."

He next asks, "Are they Israelites?" They came to the church at Corinth boasting in this national status. Israel is comprised of the 12 tribes of people who descended from Jacob. They had gone down to Egypt and lived in bondage; they were delivered out of there by God's hand; they were taken to Sinai where they received the law; and God spoke through His prophets of Israel to the people of Israel. They claimed this special status as a point of boasting to those at Corinth. "We descend from this great tradition of people who are the recipients, stewards, and interpreters of God's law." Paul notes in

his defense, "So *am I*." In Philippians 3, he gives even greater detail when he says that he was "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of the tribe of Benjamin*" (verse 5).

Thirdly, he questions, "Are they the seed of Abraham?" The false apostles noted that they could trace their lineage back to Abraham, just as the genealogy found in Matthew does for Christ Jesus. They could then say to those at Corinth, "See, we have the same credentials as the Messiah as far as our birthright and heritage. We are His same stock and are His brothers because Abraham is our father. Surely we have the right stuff to properly train you and guide you into all perfect knowledge." In response, Paul says, "So *am I*."

In his "boasting" to those at Corinth, Paul has thus far successfully defended that he is in no way "at all inferior to the most eminent apostles." Rather, he meets and exceeds them in these external boastings of the flesh. He has incrementally arranged these points to show that he is a Hebrew, thus meeting the nationality they claimed to possess. He was an Israelite, thus being an honored and special relative to God's chosen people who received the law and the covenants. And he was of the seed of Abraham, thus entitled to all of the messianic privileges associated with that great father of the faith.

But Paul's message, the gospel message, is not one based on these things. It is one based on faith in the finished work of Christ. The Corinthians held onto the false apostles because of the externals, but it is the internal which makes one right with God. Paul needed them to first get beyond the externals by showing that he was as qualified as them. After this, he will have proven that they had no advantage over him in their boasts.

Life application: When you evaluate someone who is a teacher, the last thing you should be looking for is their worldly status. Who cares if someone is a Jew? Who cares if they read Hebrew or Greek? Who cares if they have a doctorate degree in theology? None of these things mean a thing if their message isn't in line with truths found in the Bible. Don't follow pope, preacher, priest, or pastor because of their externals. Instead, follow God's word and listen to the one who is willing to place that above all else.

Heavenly Father, forgive us for following spiritual leaders because of their external attributes, but who don't follow Your word. Help us not to get caught up in their nationality, level of education, or rank in a particular denomination. Instead, prompt us to listen to those who will properly honor and rightly divide Your word. If Pope

Pontificator, Dr. Deuteronomy, or Pastor Puffed-Up is unwilling to stand on Your word alone, then give us the wisdom to turn from that false teacher and to search out one who will. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

2 Corinthians 11:23

Continuing in his comparison of himself to the false apostles, Paul asks, "Are they ministers of Christ?" This is obviously what they had claimed to be. In verse 10:7, a close comparison was made -

"Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced 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."

If they were claiming that they were ministers of Christ, then Paul would reduce himself to their level and boast of his own ministry. In doing so, he says, "I speak as a fool." The word here for "fool" is not the same as the one he has been using. Instead, he uses the word *paraphroneó*. This is its only use in the New Testament and it comes from two separate words, *para* - beside and *phroneo* - mind.

Translators vary on how they present the word, but "fool" should be excluded because of its use in previous verses. Instead, words like insane, out of my mind, a madman, deranged, beside myself, in stupidity, and so on are used to convey a strong, but different intent than "fool." His use of the words, "I *am* more" is being used sarcastically to show that the false apostles were, in fact, really deranged.

For Paul, it is in this sarcastically "deranged" state that he will boast about his ministry. Whatever type of ministers of Christ they are, Paul has exceeded them "in labors more often." For the next five verses, he will list his labors in his ministry. And yet, in comparing them to the book of Acts, he only relays a small portion of what he endured for Christ. Were he to tell all, the book would be a large one.

Continuing on, he says, "...in stripes above measure." He will explain this in verses 24 and 25. The words "above measure" mean that he, above all the others, had received such punishment. What is implied is that more punishments meant that more evangelism had been accomplished. Most would be reticent to speak after a session with rods or scourges, but Paul became more vocal, not less.

He also mentions that he was subject to "prisons more frequently." At this point in the book of Acts, only one period of imprisonment was mentioned for Paul, but this doesn't mean there weren't others. His words here testify that, in fact, he had already had multiple incarcerations.

To finish out the verse, he says that he was "in deaths often." This means that the work he did brought him close to death, or into a position where death could rightfully be expected. In 2 Corinthians 1:9, he said -

"Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead."

If the false apostles had faced any trials at all, none of them compared to Paul's in either type or in severity. He has begun to lay out the trials and pains he was willing to go through as a minister of Christ. Either he was truly insane, or he was willing to endure these trials because of his wholehearted devotion to Christ.

Life application: How strong is your faith in Christ? Would you be willing to endure the type of trials that Paul was in order to share the truth of God's word? If not, it is time for a faith tune-up. Who knows when such proofs of allegiance to Christ will be necessary for you!

Heavenly Father, can it be that I will face real persecution in my life for standing up for the truth of Your word? How many already do in my own nation. Christians have lost their businesses and have been sued of their possessions because of the perverse agendas of modern society. Others have lost their jobs and are publicly shamed for holding to the truths found in Your word. Even our own leader has mockingly accused them of being misguided. I would rather be "misguided" by the truth of Your word than to be "accepted" for twisting it into a perverse thing. Grant each of us the stamina to endure the course set before us as we hold to right application of the Holy Bible. Amen.

From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 2 Corinthians 11:24

There is quite a bit to consider in these few words. First, the word "stripes" is not in the original, but it is given for clarity and its inclusion is correct. The law of punishing a Jew by the Jewish authorities comes from the Law of Moses. In Deuteronomy, this is recorded -

"If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that *the judges* may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, ² then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows. ³ Forty blows he may give him *and* no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight." Deuteronomy 25:1-3

Forty lashes were the maximum allowed by the law. In order to ensure that this was not violated, thus breaking the command, which was given for punishment of another command, one lash was held back. The 40 lashes, minus one, are mentioned in the writings of Flavius Josephus. It is also believed that a scourge of 13 knotted thongs was used, and the person was beaten only 3 times, thus equaling 39 lashes.

It should be noted here though that this punishment of 39 lashes cannot be equated to the 39 books of the Old Testament and thus a picture of Jesus' fulfillment of the law which included his stripes recorded in Isaiah 53:5. This is a commonly taught thing which neither matches the Law of Moses (40 stripes, not 39), nor was this the punishment which Jesus endured during His passion under Pontius Pilate. That was a Roman, not a Jewish punishment, and there were no such limits set by Rome. That is a fanciful, but misplaced, use of this punishment.

Concerning Paul's receiving this Jewish punishment "five times," there is no record in the book of Acts that he ever received it. When he was beaten (Acts 16), it was a Roman punishment. It could be that he received these Jewish punishments at the various synagogues that he visited, but there is no record of it. This shows that Paul's epistles, which very well support the narrative in the book of Acts, were not written based on Acts as some people claim. Rather, they are independent writings which unite at times to confirm the truth of the two accounts. At other times, they independently highlight other things not written in the other account.

Life application: Paul was willing to go to great lengths in order to preach the gospel of Christ to his own Jewish brothers, so much so that he confirms that he was beaten by them on five separate occasions. Are we willing to endure a little bit of pain and rejection by our own people in order to share this same message? Our willingness to suffer for Christ is a sign of our devotion and dedication to Him.

Lord God, Your word is filled with stories of Your faithful prophets and apostles suffering for the sake of speaking out about Your word and the truths it contains. These people

are recorded for their faithful witness and testimony, showing that they truly cared about their relationship with You. Help us to have a similar spirit. Help us to be willing to suffer shame, and even more, for Your name and for the sanctity of Your word. Keep us from being weak and ineffective followers of You. Amen.

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; 2 Corinthians 11:25

Paul continues with his list of the sufferings he faced for the sake of the gospel. He begins with, "Three times I was beaten with rods." Only one such beating is noted in Acts which is when he was in Philippi in Acts 16. The other two beatings are not recorded. They may have occurred at any time after his conversion. This type of beating was especially painful and the account in Acts 16 shows that he needed to have his wounds tended to because of the damage that was inflicted on him.

He next notes that he was stoned once. This is recorded as occurring in Lystra in Acts 14. It was the common form of execution among the Jews for blasphemy. In Paul's case, they left him for dead, but he was hardier than they realized. It says that "...he rose up and went into the city." The fact that this claim matches that of the account in Acts in turn lends credibility to all of his claims, whether they are recorded or not.

Following this, he lists the suffering of having been shipwrecked three times. Acts only records one shipwreck that he was in, and it comes after the writing of this letter. The three he is referring to here are otherwise unknown, but it does show how dangerous it was to travel by ship during this period of history.

Finally in this verse, he says that "a night and a day I have been in the deep." This is generally considered as the result of one of his shipwrecks. The ship was far enough from land that he spent this time either swimming or holding onto a part of the ship until he was either rescued, or until he reached land. The waters around him would then be considered "the deep." However, there is another interesting possibility to what he is referring to.

One Greek writer notes that the words *en Butho* or "in Bythos," was a place near Lystra where criminals were thrown. The word *Bythos* means "the bottom" or "the deep." If this is so, then it could be a term used for a pit, like the dungeon that Jeremiah was thrown into (see Jeremiah 38:6). The word itself isn't used anywhere else in the New Testament, and Acts doesn't refer to this account, so either way it is only speculation as to what "the deep" really means.

Life application: Paul continues to show the lengths he was willing to go through for the sake of the gospel. How many of us are too tired to get up for church on Sunday or too busy to attend a Bible study or two during the week? How much time do we spend reading the Bible each day? This book came to us through much suffering and at great risk to those who penned it under the inspiration of the Spirit. Are we so overwhelmed with minutiae that we can't devote a portion of our time to studying it?

Heavenly Father, when I read the accounts of the many authors of Scripture, I see the great sufferings and trials they went through in order to bring us this precious word. Despite being influenced by the Spirit, they truly went through a lot of grief individually. Am I willing to "suffer" through a Sunday morning sermon? Am I willing to "endure" Bible study to learn Your word? Have I got the stamina to pick up the Bible each day and read it? Was all that suffering these men went through to simply be wasted in me? May it not be so! Help me to pay heed to what so many others lived and died to bring to me. Amen.

...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; 2 Corinthians 11:26

Paul's list of his many trials for the sake of the gospel continues to grow in this verse. He says, "...in journeys often." This would be the trials of his many journeys, particularly the chance of getting waylaid on the trip, such as happened to the man in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. It would also have included the many other hardships associated with traveling on foot or on an animal.

Continuing on, he says, "...in perils of waters." The word for "waters" is *potamos*. It means specifically "rivers." Thus, it carries the idea of a current, brook, or stream (as drinkable). You can get a hint of our modern word "potable" from this then. These inland rivers and streams needed to be forded in one way or another if no bridge was available. It was at times hazardous, but Paul continued on, passing over them for the sake of Christ.

His next words, "...in perils of my own countrymen," literally permeate the book of Acts. Everywhere Paul went, he faced threats of death from them, he faced their anger, and he faced their accusations. They had a deep-seated enmity towards him because of his teachings on Christ and because of his doing so to the Gentiles, both of which they rejected as ungodly. But this hatred wasn't just confined to his Jewish brothers. Instead, he was also "in perils of the Gentiles."

As it has been throughout Christian history, many Gentiles have rejected the message of Christ and thus they reject the messengers of Christ. The book of Acts, again, is replete with the perils that Paul faced among the Gentiles. And these many perils were not just isolated to one particular place. He next notes that he faced "perils in the city."

The residents of cities had animosities towards Paul and his message, just as they do today. City folk lack the intimacy with nature that those outside the city feel. Thus, they cut themselves off, in part, from God's general revelation of Himself through the beauty which surrounds us in nature. They often become apathetic to the things of God and even hostile to them. This has remained true throughout the ages. Paul faced such apathy and was in peril because of it.

But he also faced "perils in the wilderness." In the wilderness were more than just wild animals and harsh living. In the wilderness is often lawlessness, like the Old West in the US where people lived by their own code of morality and judgment. For Paul to present the gospel there would mean many perils, from man and from beast. And yet he was willing to go even into the remote places to share this wonderful message.

But there was more. He also states that he faced "perils in the sea." Some of these have already been noted by him in the preceding verse. But he may be referring to other perils of the sea. Simply witnessing to sailors might bring him into trouble. Sailors often follow their own gods which they believe will protect them from other gods who intend to do them harm. To tell sailors that what they have always believed is false would be a good way of getting tossed into the deep or being used as fish bait. Whatever Paul is referring to, he was willing to face it for the exalted name of Jesus.

He finishes up this verse with, "in perils among false brethren." The word here is *pseudadelphos*. It means a false brother or a "pretend Christian." It is only used here and in Galatians 2:4. This is certainly a jab at the false apostles that he has been speaking about, but it is also inclusive of anyone who would claim to be a Christian in order to benefit from it, even though they had no true love of Christ. The Judaizers of Galatians wanted to rob people away from the faith. Others could profit monetarily off of Christ. The list could go on and on as to the reason why someone would claim to be a Christian, but who was really a deceiver. Paul faced up to such people and was in peril because of them.

Life application: It should be true that every step we take is one devoted to the message of Christ. If that message is one which upsets the world around us, then we may face

perils because of it. Let us search our hearts and determine if we truly are willing to face difficulties for standing on the faith which we have professed.

Lord Jesus, those who truly bear Your name are confident that You are the One and only path to reconciliation with God. We can also be confident that this message is becoming more and more unpopular in the world today. Even our leaders have become openly hostile to this truth. Should we face difficulties or even have our lives threatened because of Your name, give us the strength and the presence of mind to not waffle in our convictions, but to stand firmly on Your exalted name. Let there be no fear in our hearts as we honor You with our lives. Amen.

...in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 2 Corinthians 11:27

Paul provides several more specifics concerning the difficulties he had faced for the sake of sharing the gospel message. This list begins with "...in weariness and toil." He gives this same general sentiment, using the same two Greek words, when writing to those in Thessalonica –

"...nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you." 2 Thessalonians 3:8

These words probably refer to his personal skill as a tent maker. In working with his own hands, he labored long hours in order to provide the gospel free to those he preached to.

The "sleeplessness often" was probably as much for fear of being attacked as for anything else. He was constantly under threat by those around him and he probably slept with one eye open in order to make sure he wasn't pounced upon by one of them.

"In hunger and thirst" certainly came as he traveled around searching for the next person to speak to about Christ. He was less worried about finding a tavern to eat in and more worried about finding a soul to feed the gospel to.

"In fastings often" describes his self-denial in order to come nearer to God in prayer. Fasting is mentioned in Acts 13:2, 3 and is something that he would be used to as a Pharisee. Jesus noted the fastings of the Pharisees on several occasions.

"In cold and nakedness" describes a state which he probably faced almost continuously during the winter months. He would have slept outside often as he traveled, and he may have not had a fire to keep himself warm as he did. His clothes were probably not sufficient to keep him warm. Instead, he would have been more concerned about them being light rather than bulky in order to make traveling easier.

The words Paul uses to describe himself here very closely match the sufferings of his father of the past, Jacob. When Jacob lived in Padan Aram, he tended to his uncle's flocks. During that time, he suffered just as his descendant Paul would suffer for a different type of Gentile flock. That is recorded in Genesis 31 –

"Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: "What *is* my trespass? What *is* my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? ³⁷ Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set *it* here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both! ³⁸ These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. ³⁹ That which was torn *by beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰ *There* I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. ⁴¹ Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times." Genesis 31:36-41

Life application: Inconvenience such as Paul faced is something many of us have never known. However, there are missionaries around the world who have given up on a life of ease in order to share the message of Christ in places where any and all of the hardships that Paul describes are not uncommon. Take time today to lift those weary souls up in prayer. And be willing to honor them through letters, gifts, and support if at all possible.

Lord God, we know there are missionaries spread out around the world, telling others the saving message of Your gospel. Some of them are in difficult places which are hostile to Christianity. Some of them face deprivation, hardship, and toil. Today, we lift them up to Your throne of grace, asking that You shower them with every heavenly blessing for comfort and for encouragement. Reward them according to Your wisdom and touch them with Your calming hand as they continue to press on, sharing this message of hope and love. Amen.

...besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 2 Corinthians 11:28

Paul has listed many things which have come against him during his evangelistic efforts. He has noted trials, punishments, and perils. In concluding this list, he says, "...besides the other things." The word used here is only found in the NT and only three times. Therefore, its meaning is debated. It can mean "trials which come to me externally," or it can mean "other things which I haven't mentioned." The latter is probably correct.

He has given a long list of trials and yet it is not a full and complete list. He has simply highlighted some of the events which he has faced. Along with those many external trials, he also faced, as he says, "...what comes upon me daily." The phrase here has a much stronger force in the Greek. The word indicates "that which rushes upon me." It is like an overwhelming tide. Specifically, he says it is "my deep concern for all the churches."

Paul carried with him the constant concern for those he had led to Christ. He wrote them letters, prayed for them, and carried the burden of their staying close to Christ or departing onto a wayward path. The mental pressures he faced were probably even more debilitating than the physical trials. These mental pressures rushed upon him as if an unstoppable tide at times as he struggled in his heart for his beloved children in the faith.

The Bible scholar Farrar remarks on verses 23-28 saying that it is "the most marvelous record ever written of any biography; a fragment beside which the most imperiled lives of the most suffering saints shrink into insignificance, and which shows us how fractional at the best is our knowledge of the details of St. Paul's life."

Life application: Do you carry the burden in your heart for those who have come to Christ in your life, but have then fallen away? Do you have a desire to see the immature in the faith grow into maturity? Such things should be at the forefront of our hearts and prayers as we bring these burdens to God. Remember those around you as you speak to Him, lifting them up along with all of the other physical needs of others that are so commonly prayed for.

Lord God, let us carry in our hearts the burden of seeing those around us come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Help us to not be cold concerning the plight of the unsaved. And also of importance are those who are weak or misdirected in their faith. Grant us the desire to lift them up in prayer, remembering their need for growth and proper

doctrine. Each of us is on a different level, and so help us to consider those who need such strengthening. To Your glory, amen.

Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? 2 Corinthians 11:29

From verses 22-27, Paul spoke of those physical things which pertained to him which were in comparison to the false apostles he has been referring to. He was showing the Corinthians that if they could adore the false apostles for their attributes, then he had that much more of all of those attributes to which they could attach their adoration to. This was done, of course, in a manner not intending for them to idolize him, but to show them that they were misdirected in their attitude of elevating man in the way they had.

In verse 28, Paul went from the external to the internal with the words, "besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches." His concern for the churches and all of the mental trials were also a part of his efforts for the churches he ministered to. Continuing on now with the inward things with which he struggled, he asks, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?"

This is a verse concerning his empathy for the trials that those in the church face. He was showing them that he was just like them. They had weaknesses and he too faced his own weaknesses. However, he not only faced his own weaknesses, but he also empathized in their weaknesses with them. To understand this, we can first go to 1 Corinthians 8:13 where he says, "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

Paul understood that there were those who were weak in the faith over certain issues. If their weakness demanded that he become like them in order to keep them from stumbling, then he would do so. This is then confirmed in his actions that are noted in 1 Corinthians 9:22 with the words, "...to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some."

Following this, he next asks, "Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?" Again, he shows his empathy for their situation as believers still trapped in this weakened body of flesh. There are two general views on how this verse is to be interpreted. One is purely of empathy, and one is of indignation over the offense. In other words, is the word "burn" pertaining to his own internal lusts which he struggles with (empathy with those who face the same), or is the word used concerning his indignation over their weakness?

The word for "burn" is only used one other time in a non-literal sense. In 1 Corinthians 7:9, it says –

"For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*." 1 Corinthians 7:9.

What seems more than probable is that Paul is using it in this same manner when applied to himself. Thus, this is a verse of empathy, not of indignation. First, it is in line with the previous example of being weak, and secondly, it conforms to the next verse which speaks of "the things which concern my infirmity."

It is unlikely that Paul would show indignation at another's weakness and then boast about his own frailties. This doesn't mean that Paul didn't burn with indignation at his own stumbling, or at the stumbling of others, but that he really faced such things as a human being.

However, it appears that many scholars are afraid to admit that Paul actually burned with passions, as if admitting this would somehow diminish him in his ministry. But... this is exactly what he is trying to do. He is trying to get people's eyes off of the flesh and onto the strength of Christ which is more powerful than our weakness.

Charles Ellicott is one of the few who is willing to accept that this is the proper way of interpreting this verse. He says -

"Men came to the Apostle with their tales of shame, and told how they had been tempted and had fallen; and here, too, he, in that illimitable sympathy of his, seemed to have travelled with them on the downward road. He felt himself suffused, as it were, with the burning glow of their shame. He blushed with them and for them, as though the sin had been his own."

Life application: Anyone (even your favorite pastor or preacher) burns inwardly in one way or another. Don't think that anyone is above this. If you face weaknesses and they claim that they don't, you might start looking for a new church without such an arrogant soul making claims which are simply not true. If he cannot empathize with you, then he might be prone to lording his supposed superiority over you!

Lord God, help us in our internal struggles of life. Each of us burns with some sort of moral deficiency. We secret these things away in fear that others will find out our true selves, but You know each and every one of our limitations. Help us through them.

Strengthen us in our resolve and grant us the ability to focus our eyes on Jesus, whose strength is made perfect in our weaknesses. Thank You for Christ Jesus. Amen.

If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

2 Corinthians 11:30

Paul has established that of all the things the false apostles had boasted in, he had more reason to boast. What they were, he was also, and even more. After demonstrating to the Corinthians that he was eminently qualified to boast in such things, he then wrote about his weakness and that he was one who stumbled. From that thought, he now adds on the words of this verse, "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity."

In other words, the previous boastings were done in an ironic and sarcastic manner. He didn't really boast in those fleshly things at all, but instead named them to show that what the Corinthians thought to be important was, in fact, unimportant. Now, he will begin to show the things that he could truly boast in; "the things which concern my infirmity."

In this, he is showing that the very things which are considered weak, unappealing, useless, etc. are those things which are greater than the supposed greatest boastings of the false apostles. It is nicely reflected in his previous words to them in his first epistle -

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*.²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence." 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

These things are well summed up in his coming words of chapter 12 verse 9 which say,

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Life application: Those things which seem contemptible in the eyes of the false apostles are the things we might have reason to boast in the most. The Lord is looking on the internals. If they are sound, then all of the outward flash is seen to be useless, even harmful, in our walk with the Lord.

Heavenly Father, how good You are to us. You have allowed us to have freedom of worship within Your church by allowing us to structure our churches as we see fit. There is no "one size fits all model" and there is no "true style" of church mentioned in Your word. You have not directed a certain type of music, a particular type of building, or a set time of the week or day to meet. Instead, You have asked us to worship You in spirit and in truth. And so, Lord God, be pleased to receive Your worship and praise from a thousand different cultures in ten thousand different ways. Surely You are the God of the nations! Hallelujah to Jesus our Lord who has united us as one. Amen.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 2 Corinthians 11:31

Paul now invokes the name of the Father for what he is about to say. It is certain that this is about the coming verse and not the preceding verses, because in just the verse prior he said, "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity." This was concerning future thoughts. Now, in order to show the truth of what he will say, he invokes the name of the Father as a solemn testimony that his words will be truthful.

"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is named as a confirmation of the Godhead itself. His gospel message of Christ is approved by "God the Father." The next words, "who is blessed forever" could be speaking of either "God the Father" or "our Lord Jesus Christ." In Romans 1:25, he uses "God" and "Creator" in one thought. In Romans 9:5, he uses "God" and "Christ" in one thought.

In this case, "Lord Jesus Christ" is the nearest antecedent. It appears that He is saying that "our Lord Jesus Christ is blessed forevermore" being the Son of God the Father. In other words, it is a reference to the Godhead. This might seem like over-analyzing the few words he has penned, but he has done it for a reason.

And in his invocation of the Godhead, he says that He "knows that I am not lying." Why would Paul find it necessary to make such a solemn affirmation? A few possibilities exist. First, because of the incredible nature of some of the things he is about to relay. Secondly, because there were no witnesses at hand who were available to support his claims. Third, because there may be those who charged him with not being straightforward about his claims. For these and possibly other reasons, he makes this solemn invocation.

Life application: We are shown in the word that it is not inappropriate to invoke the name of God in order to substantiate our claims, but like Paul, let us do so sparingly and

for reasons which are sound. A person who continuously invokes God's name, even over minutiae, demonstrates that he probably can't be trusted in the first place. It also shows that the name of God is not held in high esteem by him.

Lord Jesus, You who are God, You have made it very simple for us to come to know You and to be saved. We are told that You stepped out of eternity to live the life we cannot live and then gave up Your life on Calvary's cross to pay our sin debt. You have told us that if we believe this, we have eternal life. Either this is true or it is not. Why do we have to muddy the waters of Your word? Help us to trust in the simple gospel message and not add to Your word things which it does not say. And give us the strong desire to tell others of this marvelous thing You have done for us. Amen.

In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 2 Corinthians 11:32

Paul just said in verse 30 that "I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity." After that, he gave a solemn testimony that his words were true. Now suddenly, he introduces this statement as his first evidence of his "infirmity." To set up what he considered this infirmity to be, he opens with this verse concerning his time in Damascus. It is referred to in Acts 9:23-25, but with different detail given here.

He first notes, "...the governor, under Aretas the king." The term for "governor" is used only here in the New Testament. It is *ethnarches*. It is a word consisting of two separate words: *ethnos* which means "a race" or "a people group," and *archo* which means "rule" or "reign." Thus, he was the leader of the people of Damascus. Aretas, or Hareth, was the father-in-law of Herod Antipas whose capital was the city cleft out of rock at Petra. Historians suppose that Caligula placed Damascus under Aretas as a gift to him.

This unnamed governor under Aretas had "the city of the Damascenes" guarded with a garrison. This was done so that if Paul was located he was to be arrested. In addition to this guard, Acts 9 shows that Paul had other foes waiting for him as well -

"Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ²⁴ But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him."

-Acts 9:23, 24

Paul was hemmed in and any chance of getting out of the city in a normal way was considered impossible. Therefore, other means had to be employed to get him out. This

is detailed in the next verse and shows why he chose to name this under his list of infirmities.

Life application: If you are hemmed in from all sides, and if the Lord still has purposes for you in this life, He will get you out of the situation. Never fear that He has every circumstance in our lives completely within His capable hands.

Lord God, at times we feel hemmed in from every side, and it seems that there is no avenue of escape from our troubles. At times like these, why would we consider turning anywhere but to You? You have the span of our lives safely in Your capable hands and there is no trial or hardship that we face which is unknown to You. Help us to trust this and to remember that there is nothing that we are facing which is not also without Your attentive eye upon it. Thank You for this wonderful reassurance. Amen.

...but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands. 2 Corinthians 11:33

Here Paul details how he made his escape from Damascus. His words here explain "the things which concern my infirmity." There are other examples of people escaping in such a manner in the Bible. One is found in Joshua 2 -

"Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house *was* on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall." Joshua 2:15

Another similar account, with less detail, is found in 1 Samuel 9 -

"So Michal let David down through a window. And he went and fled and escaped." 1 Samuel 19:12

What is explicit in the Joshua account, and which might be inferred from the story of David, is that these men let themselves down by a rope which was thrown over the side for them. However, in Paul's case, he had to be let down by a "basket." It shows that he was too infirm on his own to climb down a rope. Thus, he seems to be hinting at the shame he felt for having to rely on others to deliver him in this way.

It was in a basket, through a small opening in the wall called a *thuris* that he was let down. The *thuris* is only mentioned twice in the Bible, once here and once in Acts 20:9 where Eutychus fell out of the window he was sitting in. Such little windows or doors

were placed into the walls of a city for those who dwelt in houses along the wall. Paul was able to get free from his foes in this manner.

Of interest is that the word "basket" here is not the same as that used in Acts 9:5. There it was called a *spuris*, which is a tightly wound plaited basket of reeds. Here, Paul calls it a *sargané*. This is a plaited rope basket. This is the only use of this word in the Bible. This probably comes from the Hebrew word *sarag*, which means to be intertwined. Thus, the same idea is conveyed for both words. If this comes from *sarag*, which is likely, Paul is subtly continuing with his comparison of himself to the false apostles by using a word of Hebrew rather than Greek origin.

Life application: God uses those who are dependent on Him and often that dependence on Him is realized in the assistance of others. Paul was placed in a situation where he needed the help of others in order to find his relief. There is nothing wrong with showing such dependence on those around us, particularly when we realize that God placed them in our lives for that very reason.

Lord, it is good to know that You are there for those who depend on You. And even more, You often put us in a position where we need to depend on others. If You have put us in that position, then the help from those others is Your divinely directed way of providing us relief. And so Lord, help us to not shun the help of others through pride, but to be thankful to You for those who do come into our life in order to relieve our needs. In the end, You have us just where You want us, even in such times. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: 2 Corinthians 12:1

Paul's first words can be taken in a couple ways. One is that they might be an ironic statement to the Corinthians. When he says, "It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast" he might be saying, "As you can see, I have done nothing worthy of boasting. I have not suffered at all as my previous words testify quite clearly." This is the highest of irony because everything he has said from verse 11:22-33 shows that he had, in fact, suffered greatly for Christ. Further, he had gone to extreme lengths to preach the gospel.

The second way his words might be taken would be as an admission that it was unbecoming of him to continue to boast in the manner which he had through the previous verses. He felt that it was improper, but that he was urged on by the fact that the Corinthians were looking for just this type of thing to boast in.

Whichever way his words are to be taken, from this "boasting," which was "doubtless not profitable," he turns to a new line of thought with the words, "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." Paul's visions and revelations are noted throughout Acts. The word "visions" is described well by Albert Barnes -

It "...is used in the Scriptures often to denote the mode in which divine communications were usually made to people. This was done by causing some scene to appear to pass before the mind as in a landscape, so that the individual seemed to see a representation of what was to occur in some future period. It was usually applied to prophecy, and is often used in the Old Testament."

"Revelations" would be the truths which were learned as a result of the visions. At least six times in the book of Acts he had specific visions that are recorded. Also in Galatians 2:2, we read this –

"And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain."

Life application: Paul claimed to have had visions because he was an apostle of the Lord. His visions led to his revelations, and they have become a part of the Holy Bible.

However, the apostolic period is over. It is best to not accept any supposed vision from the Lord at this time. There is a constant stream of such claims and the vast majority of them in no way match the Bible in content or intent. False visions have led to entire cults of people being led astray, such as those of Ellen G. White of the Seventh Day Adventists. It is far better to stick to the Bible than worry about whether someone's supposed "vision" is true. Even if it is, which is unlikely, it is unnecessary for proper faith and practice.

Heavenly Father, help us to be discerning in the truths found in Your word and to never enter anything else into our doctrine. We can learn truths about the Bible from external studies, but they cannot add to the message of the Bible and still be considered true. Help us to cling to Your word alone for that which directs our proper faith and practice and to not get led astray by false visions, claims of extra-biblical revelations, or words which are not in line with Your superior word. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 12:2

Verse 1 said, "It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast." This verse now moves into the third person to avoid any such hint of boasting. He says, "I know a man in Christ." This is referring to himself. There are a couple of ways of knowing this is so.

First, anyone else's visions wouldn't have had any bearing on his comments here. They would be superfluous to the intent of his letter. Secondly, in verse 7 he moves to the first person, still talking about the same thing. Paul is accomplishing his feat of not boasting while still conveying a thought which the Corinthians could boast in concerning his status as an apostle.

This man, meaning himself, is "in Christ." He was, at the time of the occurrence, already a Christian. This is something he speaks of concerning the redeemed several times. One example is -

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." Galatians 6:15

The dating of this epistle can be fixed at 57/58 A.D. Next, he says it was "fourteen years ago." This would make the event he is writing about around 43/44 A.D. Therefore, this is

after his conversion, but it is something not specifically mentioned in Acts. Speculation as to when and where the vision occurred is just that, only speculation.

After this, he says, "...whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows." The vision was so real to him that he felt as if he was in a body, but yet, he could not prove that he actually was. This resembles visions of the OT, such as in Ezekiel -

"And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth *month*, on the fifth *day* of the month, as I sat in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me there. ² Then I looked, and there was a likeness, like the appearance of fire—from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the color of amber. ³ He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner *court*, where the seat of the image of jealousy *was*, which provokes to jealousy. ⁴ And behold, the glory of the God of Israel *was* there, like the vision that I saw in the plain." Ezekiel 8:1-4

Ezekiel said he had a vision while he "sat in my house with the elders of Judah," wherein he was transported to Jerusalem, having been taken "by a lock of my hair." There he saw and heard and experienced, and yet his body surely remained in his house. This may be something akin to what Paul experienced. The vision was so real that he simply couldn't tell the state of his earthly body at the time.

Still referring to himself, he next says, "...such a one was caught up to the third heaven." Nonsensical debates are made as to what Paul is referring to when he says, "the third heaven." What we can deduce is that it is a real place, and that it is "other" than where we are. People write lengthy commentaries on celestial gradations of what one "heaven" or another "heaven" is like, but it is all wasted ink. What we have from Paul is all that we need to understand the rest of the vision's details.

As a point of interest though, he uses the term *harpazo* which is translated as "caught up." This is the same term he uses for what believers will experience at their own rapture which is noted in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Thus, there is no reason to not believe in a literal rapture where our bodies will be changed, and we will be transported to be with the Lord. Those who deny this must then deny Paul's vision in these verses. With God, all such things are possible.

Life application: The Bible gives us enough information to understand what happened in certain circumstances in only a limited way. The admonition to not go beyond what is written is good at such times. We should be careful to not make up things, stating them as fact, concerning things of which we cannot be sure. In other words, when someone analyzes a passage such as that of Paul's vision, make sure that it is in line with his words, but that it does not unnecessarily go beyond them.

Lord God, it sure is wonderful to peer into Your word and try to determine what is being said from the past so that we can determine what will occur in the future. Will there be a rapture? What will heaven be like? How much worse will the world get before Jesus returns? These things excite our curiosity. But help us to not go beyond what is written. Instead, help us to carefully analyze Your word only as far as You have revealed it to us. And then, help us to be patient as we wait on its full realization! Amen.

And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 2 Corinthians 12:3

Paul now seems to repeat himself for the purpose of emphasis, and many scholars generally take it that way. So far the words of verses 2 and 3 can be compared by noting them side by side -

- 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.
- And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—

In verse 3, he has added in the word *kai*, or "and." This then seems to indicate not emphasis of the same thought, but the introduction of a new thought. Verse 4 will bring that revelation to light, but regardless of what verse 4 says, Paul continues on with the same line of reasoning which is found in verse 2. He is referring to himself in the third person, and he is completely unaware of whether what he will describe actually occurred in the body or out of the body. To him, it remained an enduring mystery which only God knows.

The word "whether" is used in both verses. If there is a distinction being made between the two events, then he was unsure of his state in both circumstances as they occurred.

Life application: Paul, as an apostle of Christ, has the right to make the claim that he is making concerning his visions. His words are a part of the biblical record and God used Paul for that very purpose. He will note that the things he saw and heard while in this state were "unlawful for a man to utter." It would logically follow then that what he saw was not to be described by him (which he refrains from doing) and therefore the same would apply to anyone else who claims to have made such a heavenly visitation. It is better to not trust the visions of others than it is to find out that their words were not true. In the end, we have the Bible and so any such extra revelations, even if true, would not add to what we need for our faith and practice. So why buy the book?

Lord God, it is very hard to know the truth of the words of others at times. They make convincing stories about heavenly visits, marvelous visions, prophetic utterances, and other such things. Over the years, they are normally proven false. But one thing I know... You have already given us Your word. So why would I need extra revelations anyway? If the Bible is all-sufficient for my faith and practice, then I'll be content to let the other stuff fall by the wayside! I'm all in for Your superior word which tells me all I need to know for my trip back to You. Thank You for this precious book of love and doctrine. Amen.

...how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 2 Corinthians 12:4

Once again, with the two thoughts finished, placing them side by side gives a better perspective of Paul's statements -

- 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.
- 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.

As can be seen, it is probable, but not entirely certain, that the terms "the third heaven" and "Paradise" are not the same thing. He is likely saying that he had been caught up to the third heaven as well as having been caught up into Paradise. The word for "Paradise" here is the same word as that used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament when referring to the Garden of Eden, or the "Paradise of Eden." This word is found only three times in the New Testament; in Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 12:4, and in

Revelation 2:7. It is the reward which faithful believers will receive because of the finished work of Christ.

Paul says that while there he "heard inexpressible words." In this, there is either:

- A paradox - he heard speaking which may not be spoken because it is impossible for us to express the same words. In attempting to do so, he would do injustice to what he had heard. Or,
- They are words which are not to be uttered by man at this present time. He was allowed to hear them, but forbidden from re-stating them.

The second option seems more likely because of his final words, "...which it is not lawful for a man to utter." The Bible scholar Bengel explains the verse in this manner -

"Others, who did not hear them, cannot; Paul, who did hear them, is not sufficiently able; and though he were able, yet it would not be lawful, it would not be proper in the state of mortality; because the inhabitants of the earth would not understand them."

Life application: Verses 2-4 of this chapter show us that those who claim to have had visions of heaven, and who then repeat them, are most probably making them up. Why would God have Paul state the things he did here and then change His way of dealing with someone later? The answer is that He wouldn't. We have just what we need in the pages of the Bible to satisfy our current walk with the Lord. Further, He has given us enough information about what is coming to let us know that wonderful things lie ahead.

Heavenly Father, I know that because of Jesus, the very worst day of my life is as close to hell as I will ever get. On the other hand, the very best day of life for one who rejects Him is as close to heaven as they will ever get. As this world is disappointing even on the very best of days, I'm all in for Jesus. I cannot wait to see what wonders You have in store for us. May that day be soon! No fear here. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.

2 Corinthians 12:5

It is obvious on the surface that Paul has been speaking of himself concerning the visions of the third heaven and of Paradise. Therefore, the words of this verse are the epitome of irony. Still referring to those events as if they were someone else, he says,

"Of such a one I will boast." The reason for this is because they are divinely given honors, worthy of boasting to those who need direction in matters of a divine nature.

However, he continues with the words, "yet of myself I will not boast." This is referring to all of the sufferings and trials he endured which are noted in the previous chapter. Those are the things which the Corinthians thought were to be boasted in, as is evidenced by their boasting in those types of things in the false apostles.

However, Paul has shown them that they are merely earthly and of no true spiritual value. Because of this, he has put the thought of boasting in those things away. They no longer have the importance to him that they once did, and such things should not be a source of boasting by others as well.

But Paul finishes by noting that there is one type of earthly trial that is worthy of boasting in. Of all of the fleshly things he could have boasted in, he only does so in his "infirmities." Through verse 10, he will explain exactly why this is so.

Life application: Many of us have done things which the world would think of as great. Maybe we retired with a high rank from the military. Perhaps we were the CEO of a big company. Some of us may have been exceptional at some type of sport. Maybe we were on a TV show with a special talent. Oooh! Ah! But what value has any of this from a heavenly perspective? Zilch. Let us not boast in the things that have no heavenly value. Instead, let's try learning our Bible, telling others about Christ, and helping out in the church we attend. And when we do these things through infirmity, then we have something we can truly boast in.

Lord God, no matter what great thing we achieve in this life, if it doesn't glorify You, then it is of no lasting value. We may do something that outlasts us by a thousand years, but a thousand years in Your sight is as a passing day. In the end, it is all vanity and fading breath. Help each of us to get our priorities right and to spend our lives pursuing You. Help us to be ready for the eternal as we trudge through the temporary. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me *to be* or hears from me. 2 Corinthians 12:6

Paul is being precise in his selected wording. He just said that "of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities." Now, to show that he could, and may even desire to, boast in

something more than his infirmities, he says, "I will not be a fool." If he were to boast in his achievements, it would be the truth and it wouldn't be the mere ravings of a mad man. The things he would claim would seem preposterous to his hearers and yet it would be the truth. As he says, "...for I will speak the truth."

However, he withheld such boasting with the reason being, "lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me *to be* or hears from me." In other words, "What marvelous things Paul boasts of! Could they be true about him? He is weak, infirm, and his speech is contemptible. The man is a living paradox!"

The things which he knew, had done, and had experienced were the things which people would naturally boast in. They would elevate him to an exalted position. But these were not the things which he wanted others to notice, and so he refrained from stating them. Instead, he will focus on something of which no one would normally boast. In this, he followed the pattern of Christ who had "no form or comeliness." In Him there was "no beauty that we should desire Him." He was humble and lowly and washed the feet of His disciples.

Paul, now following that same example, will give illustrations of the things he felt it was acceptable to boast in. What the world looks for as great and worthy of note is the opposite of what the Christian should be focusing on.

Life application: Doing lowly, menial tasks is not a sign of weakness, especially if you don't have to do them. Assuming such jobs is simply a sign that you are willing to ensure that which needs to be done gets done. Never be afraid to get your hands dirty, either literally or spiritually, as needs arise.

Heavenly Father, as the world rages around us, we are often left with mixed messages. Preachers on the radio and TV tell us that God wants to bless us and that we should be living the abundant life. And yet the economy is tanking, people are arbitrarily shooting others where they work, and it is often hard to get up from bed just to face the reality of another day. This is why it is so good to have Your word hidden in our hearts. While the world crumbles and the messages of prosperity fail, Your word guides us through the troubles it said we would face. Thank You for this roadmap to peace in a difficult world. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 12:7

In the Bible, there are certain verses which come with incredibly long and detailed commentaries by scholars. This is one of them. The words of Paul here have meaning, and they convey his thoughts as he attempts to explain his infirmities; the very things in which he feels boasting is acceptable. Because of this, scholars really want to know what he is talking about.

He begins with, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations." These are the things he spoke of in verses 1-4. These revelations were the kinds of things that could then make him appear to be "the man in God's favor."

It cannot be denied that anyone who claims to have had heavenly visions is normally either elevated to an unhealthy level, or is disregarded as insane. If the visions are believed, it means that those who believe the person are willing to accept that they have participated in something divine. If this is so, then they are marked as special and worthy of listening to. It is, unfortunately, this type of thing that has led to the formation of many cults throughout the church-age.

In order that this wouldn't happen with Paul, because his visions were really true, "a thorn in the flesh" was given to him. What does this have to do with his revelations? This thorn is the very thing that will be used to show that Paul is just a man with human limitations. By having such limitations on prominent display, it would take the eyes of his audience off of the sensational elements of his life and keep them on the reality of his troubled human nature.

This "thorn" is described as "a messenger of Satan" that was used to "buffet" him. Just as Satan was allowed to afflict Job, so he is allowed to afflict any of God's people by the approval of God. However, though Satan may think that he is accomplishing evil, God will always use such trials for good. We normally see these things from our perspective - "Ouch this hurts; it must be evil," or "What a terrible situation, my heart is broken. Why has God allowed this evil in my life?" However, if we could just step out of ourselves and see the entire picture, we would then understand the greater plan. Job's afflictions, Paul's thorn, our own trials, heartaches, and losses - all of these things - are being used to serve God's ultimately good plan for His people.

For Paul, there was a good reason for his thorn. According to him, it was "lest I be exalted above measure." He understood the exact reason for the thorn. This doesn't mean that the thorn wasn't painful, but that he could endure having it because he knew it was serving a greater purpose. As we will see in the coming verses, he truly wanted it

to be taken from him, but the Lord refused his request. And He refused for a most important reason.

The question that scholars debate concerning this "thorn" is, "What is it?" A wide variety of possibilities have been submitted as to what it is. Some believe it was a moral deficiency, such as the temptation of women or the like. Others have named various physical afflictions that it could have been. Without Paul naming it, we can only speculate. However, speculation is not to be rejected outright. There are possible clues to what it could be which are found in Acts and in his epistles.

One sound speculation, although impossible to be adamant about, is that it could be failing eyesight. When writing to those in Galatia, he said to them that at one point they would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him (4:15). In Acts, when Paul was standing in the presence of the high priest, he claims to have not known that it was him (Acts 23:5). Elsewhere in Acts, Paul's set, fixed gaze is noted. This could be because of failing eyesight (Acts 13:9). When writing to those in Galatia, he told them, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!" (6:11). This could be a sign of failing eyesight. He is noted to have written this way in all of his letters (2 Thessalonians 3:17). Also, from Acts it can be implied in several passages that Paul was conducted by others in his journeying. Some of the accounts seem to imply that he was simply unable to conduct himself for some reason. Failing eyesight would be a good reason. Finally, according to the Pulpit Commentary, the word for "buffet" "is derived from *kolaphos*, a slap on the face, and would be suitable to such a disfigurement as ophthalmia."

In the end, we can only guess at what Paul's affliction was. And this is for good reason. If his affliction was named, it could only then be applied as a life example to those who had the same condition. Truly, only they could fully empathize with Paul's ordeal. But without naming the affliction, it allows for a common empathy by all people who suffer with their own burden, whatever it may be. We can look to our infirmity and be content that God has allowed it into our life, just as He allowed some type of unknown infirmity into Paul's life too.

Life application: If you have a "thorn" in the flesh - be it moral or physical - be content that God has allowed it into your life in order to bring Him glory. In the end, He has determined that it was necessary for your life to come out exactly as He intends.

Glorious God Almighty, each of us may suffer with some type of thorn in our flesh. It may be temporary, or it may be permanent. It may be a moral failure that we need to keep in check, or it may be a physical limitation that hinders us. But it has been allowed by You to frame who we are. As You have allowed it into our lives, You have granted it so that we will be shaped in the way that You see fit. How then can we complain about what You have determined is best for us? Instead, let us rejoice in such limitations or afflictions, knowing that Your plan and purpose is a long-term one which is meant for the very best in us. Thank You for this assurance. Amen.

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 2 Corinthians 12:8

Paul's thorn in the flesh was something that he was so despondent over that he petitioned the Lord three times that it might be taken away from him. Why Paul chose to continue after the first time and to cease at three times isn't stated, but it could be that he first had on his mind the parable of the persistent widow found in Luke 18:1-8. He knew that sometimes a prayer isn't answered right away, but that we are to be determined in our prayer lives.

However, after the third petition, he ceased. Maybe this was because the Lord Jesus in Matthew 26:39-46 only petitioned His Father three times in Gethsemane concerning His own coming trial. Paul may have felt that to go beyond what Christ petitioned would be inappropriate. This is all speculation, but he is clear and precise in his words. Concerning his thorn, he "pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me."

It is significant for the believer in Jesus Christ to note that Paul "pleaded with the Lord." In other words, his prayers and petitions were directed to Jesus personally. Thus, it is appropriate to pray to Him and to expect Him to be the One to respond in whatever way He chooses. In other words, it is to be inferred that Jesus Christ is fully God and that He is fully capable of handling His responsibilities within the Godhead for all of His people. Paul has set the example which we may now follow by petitioning the Lord in this manner.

Life application: This verse gives us a general guideline for a few important issues. The first is that we may petition the Lord Jesus in prayer. The second is that we should be persistent in our prayers. It's not that the Lord might not have heard us the first time, but that there are reasons He chooses to not respond immediately. A third reason is that there is a time when we should cease in our prayers. For Paul's particular case, it was three times. This is not to be considered a set amount for every occasion though.

Lord Jesus, we can know that You faithfully hear every prayer raised to You. But examples found right in the Bible show us that You don't always respond to our first prayer. Instead, You have shown that we should be diligent in bringing the same matter up as it comes to our heart. And Your word also shows us that sometimes we will receive what we ask for and other times we won't. Help us to understand the reasons behind Your decisions. But even if we don't receive that information, grant us the ability to always say, "Your will be done." Thank You that we can always come to Your throne of grace. Amen.

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

This verse is one which has brought two thousand years of comfort to those faithful Christians who are facing affliction, anguish, pain, or trial. Knowing that Christ Jesus spoke to Paul, and that his words are recorded for our benefit, allows us to know that the Lord is speaking to each of us through his words. Paul had asked three times for his thorn to be taken away. But the divine answer came back with soothing words for the path which lay ahead of him. The thorn would remain, but the Lord would be there with him through it.

What the words, "He said to me" mean can only be speculated upon. Did the Lord audibly speak to him? Was it in a vision? Or was "no response" a response in itself? In other words, did Paul deduce that this was the Lord's chosen path for him while reading Scripture and contemplating the silence concerning the removal of the thorn? Though the third option seems unlikely at first, isn't this exactly how we now receive our response? We pray for relief, we wait on an answer, and while we read Paul's words here, we realize that the affliction we are suffering is intended to be there. Maybe Paul was reading Job and came to this conclusion.

No matter how the Lord spoke to him, His answer was, "My grace is sufficient for you." We have an infirmity which limits us, we think it is a hindrance to our walk with the Lord and the accomplishment of His mission that we are trying to carry out, and yet we find that the affliction is what allows us to be fruitful in our mission. Think of Joni Eareckson-Tada! The Lord has used her *because* of her affliction and His grace has been sufficient.

Paul continues to cite the thought in the words, "for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Moses had an affliction of speech and yet the Lord's power was made perfect through his weakness. In fact, maybe it was Moses who Paul was thinking of all

along! Moses questioned the Lord's decision three times (Exodus 3:11, 4:10, and 4:13) just as Paul had done. However, he eventually yielded to the Lord's will.

However the Lord spoke to Paul, it was evident that he finally realized that God could do great things through one with an affliction. And not only would great things be done, but He would be the One to receive the glory. Who else could use the weak, infirm, dull, poor, or shunned to do such great things!

It should be noted that some manuscripts leave off the word "my." If this is correct, it turns the verse into a general proposition by saying, "Strength is perfected in weakness." If this is the correct rendering, it might make it seem cold and impersonal, but it is not. The fact that the Lord is the one who is speaking keeps it both personal and powerful.

After his realization that the thorn would stay and yet not be a hindrance to his mission, Paul says, "Therefore..." Yes! Because of these things, a good result will follow, and I will be honored to carry the thorn as a badge of that surety! "Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities."

Paul was let down the wall of Damascus in a basket because he couldn't do it himself. He was conducted around by others as he traveled because he couldn't conduct himself. He struggled through his thorn with pride in the Lord who sustained him and used him despite it. His infirmity was the greatest point of his boasting. As he says, "that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

The word for "rest upon" is *episkénoó*. This is its only use in the New Testament. It comes from two other words: *epi* (on) and *skénoó* (to dwell in a tent). Thus, it means to "arise a tent (over), dwell, spread a tabernacle over." The word *skénoó* is the same word used in John 1:14 when speaking of Christ coming to "dwell" or "tabernacle" among us.

What Paul is saying with this special word is that it is as if the power and glory of Christ Himself enveloped him like a tent. It rested upon him, and the shining glory of Christ blazed upon him *because* of his thorn. He therefore had every reason to boast in this. For Paul, the Lord's power and majesty were on display because of his infirmity! Again, think of Moses, Jone Eareckson-Tada, or any of the vast number of people in redemptive history who shined forth more brightly because of their affliction. What a great God to use the weak and fallible to reveal His power and love to the world!

Life application: If you have a limitation which you feel hinders you from a ministry for the Lord, think again. The Lord is probably waiting for you to realize that it is this very limitation which He can use most effectively.

Lord Jesus, You have said that Your grace is sufficient for us and that Your strength is made perfect in weakness. For those of us who bear an infirmity or who are weak in this body, be pleased to use us to Your glory. May Your strength be on display in us as we share our lives for Your glory. Use us as mighty warriors as we rely on Your grace to succeed in living out our lives as faithful servants. Be glorified through us, weak and weary as we are. Be glorified through us, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 12:10

This is the paradoxical attitude of Paul and of countless faithful believers since he penned these words. In Christ there is a strength which transcends our weakness. When the divine word came, he realized that he had been asking for the wrong thing. Instead of "Take this thorn from me," he found that the words, "Be exalted through my weakness" were all that was necessary to find contentment and peace.

Because of this (therefore), Paul says, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses." "Infirmities" are physical limitations in an otherwise normal human state. "Reproaches" are probably the insults that he bore because of his infirmities - such as the charge concerning his "contemptible speech" in 2 Corinthians 10:10.

His "needs" are those things which he lacked, but which were necessary to sustain him. He mentioned these in 2 Corinthians 11:27. "Persecutions" are surely speaking of the words hurled at him because of his faith in Christ, and of any physical harm that came along with the verbal abuse. He detailed some of these in 2 Corinthians 11. "Distresses" would have been the trials he spoke of in the previous chapter which came along with his travels. He was shipwrecked, faced perils, had anxiety for his beloved brethren, etc.

Each of these he faced with a new sense of vitality, taking pleasure in them "for Christ's sake." When he realized that they were a *part* of the Lord's plan for him and not merely a hindrance to it, he learned to revel in them. And the reason is explicitly given as, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." He may be weak in the body, but he had a renewed strength in the spirit which transcended anything his physical afflictions could throw at him. It was a strength which came from Christ, and it was made perfect in his weakness.

Life application: Paul has given a list of a wide variety of troubles he faced, both external and internal. And yet, none of them could overcome him to the point of dejection. Instead, he learned to exalt in them because they were bestowed upon him by Christ. Let us learn this lesson. Nothing is outside of the providence of God. If we bear an affliction, it is because He has allowed it in our lives. Let us use that affliction then to His glory.

Lord God, for every affliction we face, be it internal or external, help us to realize that it was ordained for us by You. Rather than trying to "claim" our way out of it, help us to realize that it may be there so that You will be glorified through it. Don't let us squander the chance to exalt You through our limitations. Instead, give us the presence of mind to bring You honor and glory through whatever state we find ourselves in. Be with us in this noble task! Amen.

I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. 2 Corinthians 12:11

There is emphasis in Paul's words to highlight the situation. He says, "I have become a fool in boasting" with the emphasis on "I." It is an ironic statement to mean, "By the words of boasting which I have penned, I stand convicted as a fool." Immediately after this, he says, "...you have compelled me." In this, the "you" is also emphatic. In essence, "You have forced me into this position of boasting, where I have become a fool."

To explain the emphatic nature of his words, he next carefully clarifies what has transpired - "For I ought to have been commended by you." The fault for everything Paul penned, which highlighted his qualifications and the exceptional things he had done and encountered, lay at the feet of the Corinthians. He had come to them, led them to Christ, fellowshiped with them, and together they had a personal relationship. They knew him in an intimate way. So why had they driven him to this position where he now needed to boast? They had turned from the man they knew to follow after false apostles who only meant them harm.

Because of this, he reintroduces them into his thoughts with the words, "...for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles." Here he uses the same unusual term that he used in verse 11:5. It is the "extra-super apostles" to whom he is referring. Since calling them this, he has spent a great deal of time and ink demonstrating that he wasn't just ahead of them, but he was eminently more qualified than them. He was far ahead of them in all ways. And yet despite this, he finishes the thought, "...though I am nothing."

In these words, he may be speaking sarcastically. If so, it would mean something like, "Despite all I have done, and despite all of my qualifications, the false apostles have spoken of me as nothing at all. At the same time, they have elevated themselves to a place of importance among you." It also may be that his words are serious. If so, then his intent is to say, "Despite all of the things I have done, and despite all of my qualifications, I am just a man. All of those things are rubbish and refuse. I am the bondservant of the Lord who alone is to be regarded."

Because of the possibility that either option is correct, it may be that he intended them to take it both ways. The Corinthians needed to take their eyes off of the false apostles and also keep them off of Paul when they did. Instead, they were to fix their eyes on Jesus.

Life application: As noted in a previous verse, it may be necessary to state our qualifications in order to establish a baseline of who we are in comparison to others. However, when we do this, it is important to not allow those qualifications to then elevate us to an unhealthy level in the eyes of others. After stating the qualifications to meet the intended purpose, we should remember to redirect the eyes of those we are addressing back to the One who truly deserves the attention.

Lord God, it is nice to receive a pat on the back or a compliment from others, but it is also important to not allow others to over-elevate us to a position which is unhealthy. We all have gifts and we all have talents. Just because some of them are more notable than others doesn't mean they are more important. Help us to always acknowledge the Source of other's gifts by giving the final credit to You. Help our hearts to not idolize anyone, but to instead adore You alone. Amen.

Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. 2 Corinthians 12:12

Paul just said, "...in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing." Following up with that, he immediately says that "Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you." First, he is indicating that in contrast to the false apostles, he carried with him the signs of a true apostle. A "sign" (Greek *sémeion*) is something which points to something else.

Jesus gave signs which pointed to the truth that He is the Messiah. The apostles were granted to give signs to prove that they were, in fact, commissioned by the Lord. These are the outward witnesses of this fact. But more importantly than being just signs, they

are the "signs of an apostle." Being an apostle carried certain conditions; the most important one was being personally commissioned by the Lord.

What is implied in the term "signs of an apostle" is that these signs belong to a select group of people, and they are no longer given because there are no apostles today. Therefore, the things which supposedly confirm apostleship today are false. God has validated the work of the church, and His word speaks of it. We are to have faith in His word and not in supposed externals which are falsely given by those who have no apostolic authority.

In the signs that were given, Paul says they were "accomplished among you with all perseverance." There is a decisive tone in the word "accomplished." These signs were fully wrought, thus attesting to the surety of the commission. Despite all of the difficulties the apostles faced, despite their privations, despite those who came against them and attacked them continuously, they still worked the signs of their apostleship, validating the words that followed.

Today, those who claim to do signs don't do it under hardship. Instead, they do them with a money basket being passed in front of them. They then get into a limo or a Lear jet and take off to milk another congregation full of suckers.

But the true signs of an apostle were "in signs and wonders and mighty deeds." Again, the signs pointed to something else. They were validations of their commission. The "wonders" or *teras*, were those things we might call "miracles." The miracles were so obviously of heavenly origin that no man could claim that the power to accomplish them was from the apostles, but rather from the Lord.

The "mighty deeds" or *dunamis*, are those things which testified to the power of the Source from which they were derived. It is a miracle, or *teras*, that a man is healed, but the healing is also a "mighty deed" or *dunamis* because of the Source of the miracle. It is the effective working of God's power through the apostle.

Life application: If we have faith in Jesus to save us from our sins, then we should ask, "Where did I hear of Jesus in order to have faith?" The answer is, "From the Bible." If we believed the message about Jesus, then why should we not accept the rest of the Bible which gives us the full word of God? If we don't believe that the apostles had the power to work miracles, then why should we believe that Jesus can save? Either the Bible is true in its entirety, or it is a false book. And if we believe the testimony of the Apostle's

signs, then why would we need other signs today? The Bible itself is to be our sign. Read your Bible and have faith that it is God's word.

Lord God, what sense does it make to believe that Jesus is able to save us, but then to not believe the rest of the Bible? It is the Bible which tells us about Jesus. If other parts of it aren't true, then how can we know that the part about Jesus saving isn't also false? No! It is all or nothing. And the fact is that Jesus does save! And so, help us to trust that Your word is true in its entirety and then to hold fast to it for our life and doctrine. Amen.

For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong! 2 Corinthians 12:13

Paul asks the Corinthians a pointed question - "For what is it in which you were inferior to the other churches?" He had spent an immense amount of time with them. He had demonstrated the power of his apostolic ministry among them through demonstrations of the Spirit. He had treated them as his own children. In every way imaginable, he had elevated the church and its congregants above himself as he ministered to them. All of this was certain, but with one difference. He says, "...except that I myself was not burdensome to you."

They seemed offended at the thing which was the most endearing from his standpoint. He had not been any burden at all to them in order that they would be able to grow spiritually without being weighed down in caring for him. Here he uses the same word for "burdensome" that he used in verse 11:9.

It is a rare word which gives the idea of numbness or deadness. It is connected to the torpedo fish which makes anything it touches numb. The intent is that even though he was present with the Corinthians, he asked for nothing which would numb them to his ministry. And so, in what is the highest of irony, he states, "Forgive me this wrong!" He had lavished upon them the greatest of honors, one of which was to not burden them, and yet they took this as an offense rather than as it should have been received.

Life application: Paul's intent for the church was certainly pure and without any strings attached, and yet the people there misread his actions. It is always good to take a moment to ponder the reasons behind things before assuming ill intent. Let each of us be slow to anger or offense and quick to show gratitude towards others.

Lord God, help us to be slow in showing offense and to take time to ponder carefully the actions of others before flying off the handle and ruining a perfectly good relationship

over minutiae. Instead help us to build them upon gratitude for the help and benefit we do receive. Grant that we won't look at petty things which may actually be our misunderstanding of whatever issue has arisen. Bestow this on us so that harmony will exist between those of us who endeavor to be faithful followers of You. Amen.

Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. 2 Corinthians 12:14

Scholars generally agree that this isn't speaking of the third actual visit, but that he had intended to come a second time and was thwarted. This is now the third time he is "ready" to come to them. Or, others disagree and feel that he simply had an unrecorded visit to Corinth. Either way, it is Paul's express intent to visit them when he arrives. And when he does, he plans to conduct himself in the same manner as he always had by stating that "I will not be burdensome to you."

This is one of the things they had found fault in him for. But he has carefully and methodically explained to them why he has been no burden on them and why that would continue. It is because, as he says, "I do not seek yours, but you." He cared nothing about their property or their wealth, but them. He wanted the people at Corinth to be saved and then to grow in proper doctrine; not to be led astray by false teachers.

His justification for this is that "the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." He treated his congregations as his own children. This is implied in his words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:2 and to Titus in Titus 1:4. Those he had led to the Lord became his sons in the faith. It can then be inferred that the congregations he had established also were his children in the faith. This verse confirms that.

And because they were, he gave them words which are obvious to all people in all societies. The parents, if they are wise with their resources and labors, will store up their wealth in order to pass it on to their children. Paul felt this was his spiritual obligation for them. He studied Scripture, he pondered the mysteries of Christ, and he worked with his own hands to not burden the congregation at Corinth. In all of this, he laid up for them so that they would be the benefactors of his resources and labors.

Life application: Paul has set a good example for pastors, preachers, priests, and ministers. It is right that the congregations remember those in such positions and take

care of them (Galatians 6:6), but it is also true that they should not be burdensome on their congregations. They should be willing to work to supplement their pay if necessary. They should also not burden those under them with things that they can do for themselves. Above all, they should be a blessing in all spiritual matters to those they minister to.

Heavenly Father, how good it is to receive spiritual insights and teachings from our pastors and Bible teachers. Thank You for their diligence in searching out Your word and illuminating difficult passages for us to grasp and then apply to our doctrine. And thank You also for the many generations of such men who lived in years gone by. We are the recipients of their accumulated knowledge. Each lover of Your word adds on a bit more knowledge so that we have a clearer picture than ever of the mysteries it contains! How blessed we are! Thank You, O God. Amen.

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. 2 Corinthians 12:15

Paul just noted that the parents should save up for their children. As he considered the church at Corinth as his children in the faith, he explains what this then means. To him, it wasn't just saving up a bit and considering the job done. Instead, he says that he "...will very gladly spend and be spent." The Greek word for "spend," *dapanaó*, is used to indicate the incurring of an expense or even to waste one's money entirely. It is used that way in Luke 15 in the parable of the lost son. He wasted all of his money in a foreign land and became needy.

Adding onto that thought, he next uses the Greek word *ekdapanaó*. It is the same word with the prefix *ek*, or "out" attached to it. Thus, it is to be completely exhausted or to spend out completely. It is used just this one time in Scripture, and is given to show the great length Paul was willing to go to in order to minister to the Corinthians. In this expenditure, he notes that it is "for your souls."

He wasn't worried about their physical needs, their desires, or any such thing. Instead, he was concerned about their spiritual relationship with the Lord. To him, this is where his efforts were to be focused. And it is evident from his letters that this is exactly where his heart and attention were directed.

He finishes this thought with, "... though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved." This is certainly a rebuke towards them. The more attention he doted on them, and the harder he worked in order to not be any burden to them, it appeared that they

came to love him less. There seemed to be an increasing ingratitude in them that welled up with his continued attention towards them.

Life application: Paul's words in this verse show us that there should not be a set of scales in front of us as we minister to others. If there were, when the balances tipped to one side or another, we would change our level of attention and devotion each time we encountered them. If you, for example, do mission work in the downtown slums or projects, you can never expect any sort of reciprocity in your care of the downtrodden you are ministering to. As a Bible teacher, you may be teaching the spiritually downtrodden. In the same manner, why would you expect them to respond with a great return on the spiritual lessons you impart? Be willing to expend everything for those you minister to. The Lord does see, and He will reward.

Lord Jesus, grant to us hearts like Yours. Help us to be willing to spend ourselves, even to the point of being expended if necessary, in order to minister to those who are in need. There are so many who either could never repay or who simply will never repay, the kindness shown to them. But give us the desire to keep on giving in order to lead them to You. In the end, this life is temporary, but the one You offer is eternal. Help us to keep things in that perspective. Amen.

But be that *as it may*, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning! 2 Corinthians 12:16

Paul's words, "But be that *as it may*" are based on his previous words which said, "...though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved." Despite the attitude towards his loving demonstrations, it was his continued stance to not be a burden on them. This is contrary to nature as most people would simply give up after a while, but Paul knew that changing his tact and accepting assistance from them could only make things worse. And so, he determined to continue to be no burden on them at all. The "I" in this clause is emphatic - "I did not burden you." This leads us to understand the words of the next clause.

As he emphatically asserts that he didn't burden the Corinthians, then there is another option which he must refute. He does so with the words, "Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning!" These words would be as if he were quoting them. "Yes, you were no burden on us, but you deceived us in another way. You have announced that you want to take a collection to the saints in Jerusalem and you have sent others to collect it. However, we are sure that you will profit, at least in part, from the collection."

This is a possible charge of the false apostles which then infected the minds of the Corinthians. Paul, showing them the silliness of such a charge will defend against it in the verses to come. He has been careful to handle everything in the most professional and open manner possible in order to avoid the very conflict that he is now addressing.

As a way of shining light on the words of this verse, the ISV and God's Word translations both change it into a question rather than stating it as a fact. Instead of "I caught you by cunning," they translate it this way -

"Granting that I have not been a burden to you, was I a clever schemer who trapped you by some trick?" ISV

This clears up any misunderstandings by the reader who may assume that Paul actually acted in a deceitful manner. The reason why this is important is that if Paul acted in deceit, then it would imply that this was an acceptable means of acting to achieve one's goals. In essence, "The ends justify the means." Such is not the case with Paul's words.

Life application: One needs to understand when irony is stated or when someone is writing words as if they are spoken by another. This isn't always easy to do and even learned scholars who understand the original languages will often disagree on what the actual intent of a verse is. This is a good reason for us to refer to many translations and to diligently study the writings of many scholars. In so doing, we can get a better sense of what is probably the correct interpretation of some very difficult verses.

Marvelous Lord God! You have brought each of us to the point where we are at in our lives. Some of us today are filled with abundance. Some of us are facing lack. We may be healthy and filled with pep, or we may be on our death bed. But no matter what our station is at this time, for those of us who have called on Jesus, the best times lie ahead. Thank You for the surety that whatever we are facing is something that can only get better when He comes for us. How great that day will be! Even so, come Lord Jesus! Amen.

Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? 2 Corinthians 12:17

Concerning this verse, Charles Ellicott notes, "The English expresses the meaning of the Greek, but does not show, as that does, the vehement agitation which led the writer, as he dictated the letter, to begin the sentence with one construction and finish it with another - 'Did any of those I sent . . . did I by this means get more out of you than I ought?'"

Paul is truly upset at the implied accusation which appears to have been leveled at him from the previous verse. That said, "Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning!" Concerning those people he sent, it could be referring to Timothy who was sent before the writing of the first letter (see 1 Corinthians 4:17), or it could be referring to Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus who carried his first epistle to them (see 1 Corinthians 16:17), or it could even be speaking of Titus who was sent to determine the state of those at Corinth (see 2 Corinthians 7:6).

He is, in essence, asking them to tell him how they were swindled. Which of them did something improper on Paul's behalf and under his instruction? The word he uses for "take advantage of" is *pleonekteó*. It gives the idea of fraud. Paul is asking them to lay out on the table all their cards and to show how he was involved in such a thing. He knew that he was not, and he is trying to get them to consider the matter.

Life application: Far too often, those who teach spiritual matters faithfully are attacked by those who disagree with their doctrine, even (and maybe especially) because their doctrine is sound. People attempt to find wiggle room in what they believe because the Bible forces us to live in a manner which we may not like. The devil wants nothing more than to distract and disarm those who carry the word of God faithfully to others. Unless there is a true mark of exceptionally bad doctrine, it is better to not accept any charges of false conduct by others who may have a set agenda, like the false apostles who came to Corinth to malign Paul.

Lord God, help us to consider proper doctrine and to not be swayed by any person who has a good sounding message, but which does not align with Your word. Too often we get duped by fine oration and flashy messages and fail to see that what is said is tainted with that which is incorrect. Help us to learn to rightly divide Your word and to stand on the truth of Your word, in context and without the biases that we are so prone to. Amen.

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? 2 Corinthians 12:18

This is probably not referring to the upcoming visit recorded in 2 Corinthians 8 (although some scholars claim that it is, saying that he is writing in an "already-done" manner). Instead, this is probably referring to Titus' earlier visit to them.

Concerning that visit, Paul asks them to reflect on his behavior while there. He had come with "our brother," meaning someone well known to them who could then substantiate the character and demeanor of Titus. The KJV incorrectly says "a brother,"

not acknowledging the article which precedes "brother." Even the "our" of the NKJV is vague. The article (lit. "the brother") conveys the meaning "our mutual brother." The definite nature of the person is highlighted to show that he could be checked with for confirmation of the conduct of Titus at any time.

To draw out a defense of how Titus actually conducted himself, he asks, "Did Titus take advantage of you?" The question is rhetorical. Paul knows very well he didn't, and they will have no other response to it than, "No." Titus certainly never did a thing while among them that could be considered in this light.

Continuing on and still in defense of Titus, he asks two more rhetorical questions, "Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did *we* not *walk* in the same steps?" The answer to both will be in the affirmative. Just as Paul had conducted himself before those at Corinth, so did Titus when he was there with them. Both Paul and Titus had maintained the highest level of integrity before them. Therefore, Paul is asking them to consider the false apostles' accusations from that light.

Where had they done wrong? Where had they offended? Where was their manipulation of the Corinthians? None could be found!

Life application: Paul wisely chose a brother who was known to both parties when he sent Titus to Corinth. In so doing, he could act as an impartial witness to what occurred if there was ever a need to do so. Such forethought can, at any later time, prove that all was done in an above-board manner. Let us remember this type of action in case we ever find ourselves dealing with a similar sensitive matter.

Precious Lord! It is a new day filled with hope and possibility. I wonder what will come my way. If good things and abundant blessings are to be realized, then give me the wisdom to thank You for them as they come. And if difficulties, loss, or heartache come my way, give me the ability to continue to praise You through the storm. Is my gratitude to You conditional upon only good times and blessings? May it never be so! Help me to be a faithful follower of You no matter what comes my way. Amen.

Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But *we do* all things, beloved, for your edification. 2 Corinthians 12:19

Paul begins this verse with "Again..." He is probably referring back to 2 Corinthians 5:12 which said -

"For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart."

He is not making a defense for himself and those with him to the Corinthians as if he were trying to curry favor with them. Rather than such a thing, which would certainly be looked at as if done with improper motives, he affirms that "We speak before God in Christ." This phrase is an interesting clue as to the nature of the Trinity.

"Before God in Christ" means that he is acceptable to God and thus able to make his appeal before Him because he is "in Christ." He lives within Christ, having received His finished work. There is a nearness to God because of this position. So much so that when he speaks, God is a witness to his words, judging them as to their sincerity. As this is so, then the Corinthians should view the words in the same light.

And those words are not words of currying favor. Instead, they are sincere and without hidden motive. They are simply the way things are. Instead of trying to ingratiate themselves to the Corinthians through inappropriate means, he says that "we *do* all things, beloved, for your edification." The charges of the false apostles had attempted to show Paul as an opportunist and one who couldn't be trusted. But instead of that, everything he did for those at Corinth was to build them up and to bring them to a state of sound doctrine and holy living.

There was no hint of impropriety in his actions, or in the actions of those whom he sent to minister to them. In all ways, their conduct was to be considered pure and with only the good of those at Corinth in mind.

Life application: Paul's affirmation that his words were "before God in Christ" should be a sobering reminder to us that if we are "in Christ" then we are being looked at from that standard. Our words are to be pure, our actions are to be noble, and our hearts are to be undefiled by impure intent. We are representatives of God and should always consider that in our interactions with others.

Lord God, the Bible uses the term "in Christ" to designate the state of believers who have received the finished work of Jesus. We have moved from fallen Adam to our sinless Savior. Help us to remember this position and to live it out, repenting of our inappropriate actions, and bringing glory to You because of this most favored state. He died for us; help us to live rightly for Him. It is a difficult walk, but keep us on that straight and narrow path! Amen.

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, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults;

2 Corinthians 12:20

Paul has already alluded to a visit with the Corinthians in several ways. In 2 Corinthians 1:23, he said that he specifically refrained from visiting in order to spare them. His words now bring in that same thought. If he comes, things might be in chaos,, and he would have to take apostolic action.

In 1 Corinthians 4:21, he asked if he should come to them "with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" It seems that any coming visit would be one of anxiety for him, not really knowing what he was to expect. And once he got there, he was anticipating the worst. He says, "I shall not find you such as I wish." He would hope for a pleasant visit with a group of people dedicated to Christ and hungry for sound doctrine.

And in like manner, he was afraid that the Corinthians would find Paul in a manner that they wouldn't wish for as well. He would come with a rod of correction as necessary, and he would come to redirect them from their many failings too. If this is what he found, then this is what he would come to do.

From there, he mentions the failings that he was fearful he would find, beginning with "contentions." This word gives the sense of quarreling or strife. It is those who are looking for a fight simply because it is their nature to engage in such a thing. They are the type to divide people into factions for the sake of disharmony rather than harmony.

Next he notes "jealousies." The Greek is *zēlos* and the root it comes from means "hot enough to boil over." Thus, *zēlos* is an onomatopoeia "that mimics the sound of water bubbling over from heat." It would indicate those who were disposed towards defending their own views regardless of the cost.

Next he mentions "outbursts of wrath." Literally, it says "wraths." Paul was expecting people lash out at one another as they defended their position. Instead of harmony, there would be chaos because of this negative attitude which would spill over into much anger.

He also notes "selfish ambitions." According to Helps Word Studies, this word properly means, "work done *merely for hire* (as a *mercenary*)." It would thus be "referring

therefore to *carnal ambition (selfish rivalry)*." People would be willing to defend another side simply because of whatever gain they thought they could get out of it.

After this, "backbitings" are noted. The word is *katalalia* and one can almost hear the intent in the word. It is only used here and in 1 Peter 2:1. It gives the idea of "evil-speaking, backbiting, detraction, slander."

"Whisperings" are Paul's next area of concern. The word is *psithurismos* and this is its only use in the New Testament. The sound is adapted to the sense. It indicates secret slanders. It speaks "of the murmuring of a snake-charmer." These come from people with the devil's forked tongue.

Next "conceits" are named. Again, a word unique to the New Testament is given here. It is *phusiósis*, and it means "inflated, like an air-bellow." It thus gives the idea of being puffed up and it conveys the sense of arrogance and negative pride which then fosters an inflated ego.

Finally, Paul finishes with "tumults." This is the type of thing one would expect in a riot. It gives the idea of generating confusion, being out of control, and having everything up for grabs. In this, "*uncertainty and tumult* inevitably generates more *instability*."

Paul certainly had a lot of worries concerning his visit as he pondered what he might find there at the dysfunctional church at Corinth. Charles Ellicott notes that the list "...forms a suggestive parallelism of contrast to that in 2 Corinthians 7:11." He also says that, "The ethical imagination of the Apostle, with its keen perception of the shades of human character, dwelling now on the manifold forms of opposition, as before it had dwelt on the manifold fruits of repentance."

Life application: How alike the church at Corinth are many churches today. People seem to revel in one sort of perverse conduct or another. Let us keep ourselves in check and not add to the grief that pastors already face as they are pulled in a thousand directions at once. Instead, let us listen to the words of Paul and take them to heart. Instead of strife, let us purpose to be filled with peace.

Lord God, help us to be the type of faithful believers who look for peace and contentment in our church. Too often someone comes in who wants to cause division and strife. Help us to never be a part of that, but instead give us wisdom to be peacemakers. It is certain that You would want us to be faithful congregants who look for proper doctrine and harmonious interaction. So Lord, please help us in this. Amen.

...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 lewdness which they have practiced. 2 Corinthians 12:21

Paul just spoke of his coming and the many possible difficulties he expects that he might face upon his arrival. In addition to those things, he repeats the notion of his coming and an expectation that he "will be humbled among" them. He is writing as if it is a pretty certain thing that this will be the case. He was a faithful pastor, presenting them with the gospel and they received it. However, being saved carries more than just walking through the doors of this new life. It also involves the purging away of the old life.

He will be humbled because they only grasped the salvation, but then failed to put their salvation into practice. Because of this, he says he "shall mourn for many who have sinned before." The word "before" is taken by scholars in a couple of ways. One is that it speaks of their lifestyle before being saved. The other is that they fell into sin since then, but before his coming to them. The first seems more natural. They were saved by Christ and yet never put their salvation into practice. Either way, the idea of his words is that they were already-saved offenders.

After this he says, "...and have not repented." This shows us that repentance is necessary for right living within the church, but it is not necessary for salvation. The categories are far too often mixed by people in the church. In essence, their call is "Repent and then be saved." This is not proper doctrine. Salvation is one category, repentance is another.

It is illogical to say one must "repent in order to be saved" if salvation is by grace through faith. It is also illogical to say that one will "lose their salvation" if they don't repent. The reason for this is found in Paul's words. He never tells them this would occur. Instead, he shows in his writings that the consequences for failing to repent will result in difficulties in this life and a loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.

Next Paul identifies three categories of sin which require correction: Uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness. The "uncleanness" indicates impurity of some sort. Their defilement is because of their lifestyle. "Fornication" is related to pornography or sexual impurity. HELPS Word Studies says that it indicates "'to sell off') – properly, a *selling off* (surrendering) of sexual purity; *promiscuity* of any (every) type." And the word for "lewdness" indicates "wonton caprice."

Paul was afraid that these were still being practiced among the congregants. Vincent's Word Studies notes that the three categories of sin should be connected with Paul's mourning and not with the repentance. In other words, "I shall mourn for the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness of the many that have sinned before and have not repented." This then demonstrates with all certainty that "repentance" is an entirely different category than salvation itself. The two cannot be logically connected.

Life application: There is a logical structure to salvation and then walking with the Lord which is often twisted by those who are unwilling to research proper doctrine. Israel was redeemed from Egypt and then they were given the law. God did not "un-redeem" them if they failed to adhere to the law by sending them back to Egypt. Rather, He gave penalties for disobedience. The same is true in the church today. We are saved unto holy living; we are not holy livers who are then saved. It is by grace that we are saved through faith. After that, we are to get our doctrine and our lives in order.

Glorious God, thank You for the salvation that comes freely through faith in Christ. Thank You that we didn't have to do something in order to receive this gift. Instead, we simply called out for a Savior. Now Lord, help us to walk rightly in our new life and to repent of what we have wrong in our life so that we will be pleasing to You. For all You have done for us, we owe You this and so much more! Thank You for the shed blood of Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER 13

This *will be* the third *time* I am coming to you. "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." 2 Corinthians 13:1

Despite the seeming obvious nature of the words of this verse, it is highly debated over, both in the initial clause and in the quote. First Paul says, "This *will be* the third *time* I am coming to you." What does that mean? The obvious answer is that he had been there twice, and this would now be his third visit. If one were to simply read the epistle without studying Acts and 1 Corinthians, this would be the obvious conclusion.

However, there is no noted "second" visit to Corinth. Instead, there is the note that Paul intended to come, but decided not to because of the sorrow such a visit would bring (2 Corinthians 2:1). Therefore, some commentators take the word *erchomai* as "I am coming." It is a verse of intent. Thus, it would read, "This is the third time I have intended to come to you."

Either way, whether through an actual series of visits, or through his intended visits, Paul had indirectly "come" to them through his letters. He now intends to come again in person. This will occur after his letter is received and digested by the Corinthians.

After his initial words comes another curious item. It is a quote found several times in the Old Testament. He says, "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." One such OT reference is Deuteronomy 17:6 -

"Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness."

Jesus cites the precept as well in Matthew 18:16 –

"And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

Though those are Old Testament references (Jesus spoke those words under the law to Israel), Paul uses them as well. This shows that it is as much a part of natural revelation as it is a precept found under the law.

Having said that, the intent of Paul's words is taken by various scholars in several ways. First, is he tying his "third visit" to the "three witnesses?" Are they the "attestations to

truths which he preaches" (Pulpit Commentary)? If this is the case, then this "turns the judge into a prosecutor, and makes him appeal to his own reiteration of his charges as evidence of their truth" (Charles Ellicott).

Others say that this is referring to his visit, but that it is a petition for the Corinthians to not take action prior to his arrival. Bengel's Gnomon says, "Therefore in this matter the apostle thought of depending not on an immediate revelation, but on the testimony of men; and he does not command the culprits to be cast out of the Church before his arrival."

Another scholar, Lightfoot, makes the supposition that he refers to Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. They went on behalf of Paul and were witnesses to them of his purpose. They had the information concerning the events at Corinth and had transmitted them to Paul. This seems less likely because this would make Paul a fourth witness when he arrived at Corinth to determine what was going on. As he cites the precept "two or three" then why would he actually mean four without stating it as such? Further, it ignores Titus' visit and report as well.

Finally, Albert Barnes notes that "he anticipated that there would be necessity for the administration of discipline there, but that he would feel himself under obligation in administering it to adhere to the reasonable maxim of the Jewish Law. No one should be condemned or punished where there were not at least two or three witnesses to prove the offence. But where there were, discipline would be administered according to the nature of the crime."

This seems reasonable as well, but why would Paul reinsert Jewish law which was annulled in the New Covenant? He is particularly adamant that the law is fulfilled in Christ and thus set aside; it is "nailed to the cross" (Colossians 2:14).

What seems the most likely option is that Paul is, in fact, tying the statement that this is his third visit in with the "two or three" witnesses as a point of natural revelation which the law only confirms. He has visited and written to the Corinthians, and he will visit again. If there is still sin which has not been repented of in the church, he will deal with it based on his past warnings and admonishments.

Life application: Let us carefully evaluate each verse of the Bible. It is acceptable in verses like the one we are looking at to say, "I think the most likely option is..." However, we should never get so bull-headed about it that we refuse to consider other options as well. There is one ultimate meaning, it is true, but maybe we have

misevaluated the verse from the start. Let us take care to always consider that we don't know it all and so let us be willing to be open to correction as we grow in knowledge and in doctrine.

Lord God, how marvelous it is to see Your word continue to unfold, even after 3500 years of it being searched out. From time to time, a new insight is realized that has never been seen before. What a marvel! Thousands of scholars have searched out this marvelous gift from You and yet a new idea is brought forth that has never been revealed! How marvelous You are! How great is Your word! Thank You for Your superior word, O God! Amen.

I have told you before, and foretell 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— 2 Corinthians 13:2

Paul had already warned the Corinthians concerning their lack of repentance. Specifically, he says this in 1 Corinthians 4:21, but it is implied throughout 1 Corinthians 5 as well. He had warned them, and he now gives them another advanced warning. His words, "...and foretell as if I were present the second time" are translated differently based on whether one believes Paul had made two visits or just one so far.

The way the NKJV (cited here) translates it, only one prior visit is presupposed. However, some other translations state it this way - "I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time..." (NIV). Either way concerning this issue though, he now says, "...and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to the rest, that if I come again, I will not spare."

Paul doesn't question their salvation, but he does question their right to continue in sin without correction. He will not tolerate it within the body and so he will take decisive action to correct any such failings to bring one's actions in line with the salvation they profess.

Life application: When one comes to Christ, he should go through a process of giving up on the sin which exists in his life. This naturally comes after salvation. One does not get himself well in order to go to the doctor. Rather the doctor cures them. We call on Christ and then have to follow His instructions concerning the cure which He has provided. Repentance necessarily follows salvation. If it does not, then the individual is to be corrected through the means available to the church.

Lord God, how I love You! Thank You for the wonderful gift of Christ Jesus. He has given me life, hope, and restoration with You. Help me now to be obedient to the word You have given me. Help me to make the necessary corrections in my life which You will find pleasing. May my doctrine be pure, and my life be one which glorifies You always. Amen.

...since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. 2 Corinthians 13:3

Paul just said that he would not spare "those who had sinned before." In other words, those who had sinned and were continuing in sin would be shown that Paul was capable of rooting them out and disciplining them. Understanding this, he now says, "...since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me." The Greek is literally, "...of the Christ that speaks in me." Vincent's Word Studies notes that it is, "An experimental proof of what kind of a being the Christ who speaks in me is."

They had challenged him by holding to the words of the false apostles, they had challenged him in their words concerning his ability to present himself as a leader, and they had implied that there was weakness in him. But he was ready to come and give "a proof of Christ speaking" in him. As an apostle, the power of Christ was there to give him words. It was a guarantee from Christ to His apostles and Paul was relying on that, knowing that it was so.

In this power of "Christ speaking in me," he notes that it "is not weak toward you, but mighty in you." A better translation of this is "among you" rather than "in you." Again, Vincent's notes, "He is speaking, not of Christ as He dwells in them, but as He works with reference to them (εἰς) and among their number, inflicting punishment for their sin."

The power of Christ in Paul was capable of being displayed among them for the correction of their failings. He would use that power in order to execute exactly that.

Life application: We now have the word of God written down so that we have on record the power of Christ which Paul possessed. It is our standard and our authority to execute discipline within the church. The power that Paul speaks of concerning himself is an apostolic authority which is no longer needed in individuals. The reason is that this power has been defined in the pages of Scripture. Let us be careful to hold to the Bible as the rule and guide for our doctrine and practice within the faith.

Heavenly Father, today help us to commit a portion of our time to share with another the wonder of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grant us boldness to say what Jesus said, clearly

and without equivocating - "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." And then Lord God, grant us the ability to explain that truth so that they will understand the way and receive the life. The message is simple, but it is fixed. Grant us the intestinal fortitude to stand on the truth of those words and never to waffle in our convictions as we share the good news. Amen.

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.

2 Corinthians 13:4

Paul now draws a comparison to his ("we" meaning he and the apostles) life in Christ and Christ's life in the flesh. In verse 12:9, he said concerning the words of Jesus to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." This explains what is on Paul's mind here in the analogy he is making.

He begins with "For though He was crucified in weakness..." This is speaking of the weak, even fragile human nature which Christ possessed. Paul refers to it elsewhere, such as in Philippians 2 -

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross." Philippians 2:5-8

It was in this weak, human condition that He was crucified. Despite being able to call on all the powers of heaven and earth to rescue Him, He condescended to allow the creatures He created to crucify Him. Paul is drawing the same comparison. Though apostles, and possessing the apostolic gifts of signs, miracles, and wonders, they still came humbly to those they ministered to. In Paul's case, he refrained from even accepting any assistance from them; something he could have otherwise expected. This is evidenced by the words, "For we are also weak in Him."

"Yet He lives by the power of God" is speaking of Christ now - raised to His position within the Godhead and alive forevermore. He has all authority "in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18) at His disposal. It is in this state that He now and forevermore will exist. Paul's analogy to this is found in the words, "but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you." Again, this is speaking of his (and the others with him, thus "we") apostolic power.

His words are addressed to all of those in Corinth, but they are specifically referring "to those who have sinned before" (verse 13:2). This is why he then said, "that if I come again I will not spare— since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you" (verses 13:2, 3).

Paul was ready to use his power as an apostle to ensure that the church, for which Christ died in weakness, would live by the power of His resurrection.

Life application: Again, as has been explained many times, there is no longer a need for an apostolic ministry which displays power among the churches. The Bible testifies to the ministry of the apostles and thus it is our sign that God was able to establish His church and how He did it. Because of this, we have no need for such signs today. Don't be led astray by false apostles who are really just cheap magicians. Instead, look to God's word to understand the power of God in Christ.

Lord God, Your word is power and in it is found all of the things necessary to see Your hand working in Your church for our good. We don't need external signs of the apostles anymore because we have the testimony of the power of the apostles recorded there. Help us to understand this. Just as we are to believe that You once parted the waters of the Red Sea, so You once granted Your power to a group of people to establish Your church. Give us faith to understand that from these examples, we can know that You are always here and working out a good end for us, even now. Amen.

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

2 Corinthians 13:5

Paul now takes the time to turn around the Corinthian's accusations concerning his true apostleship and have them reflect on their own status. In both instances of the word "yourselves," it is placed in the emphatic position. This stems from their challenge of Christ speaking in Paul from verse 3. As Charles Ellicott restates this, "You seek a test of my power. Apply a test to yourselves. Try yourselves whether you are living and moving in that faith in Christ which you profess."

He is asking them to look into their own consciences and determine what is going on there. However, Vincent's Word Studies says that rather than "examine" yourselves, it should read "try" yourselves. He notes, "Examination does not necessarily imply a practical test. It may be merely from curiosity. Trial implies a definite intent to ascertain their spiritual condition."

Paul's admonition for them to check whether they are "in the faith" is followed up by a second admonition which is to "Test yourselves." This word, *dokimazete*, has more force than the word for "examine." It is a word which is used when proving metals through heat to determine their purity. Once they have "tried" or "examined" themselves, they can now go a step further and "prove" what they have tested.

In the theology of the Bible, and supported by the words of Paul, faith is what saves. In order to know if one is in *the* faith, they have to try and prove *their* faith. Albert Barnes wisely notes that "it is remarkable, that while a child has no doubt that he loves a parent, or a husband a wife, or a friend a friend, almost all Christians are in very great doubt about their attachment to the Redeemer and to the great principles of religion."

Why should this be? It is because we fail our Lord; it is because we spend our time challenging the faith of others instead of tending to our own faith; and it is because we become unsure about the God that we cannot see. This is what the Corinthians had done. They had learned to trust the false apostles, with their externals on prominent display, and they had stopped trusting in Christ in themselves, the hope of glory.

Instead of this, Paul turns their possession of faith into a question, "Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?" He is asking if they are sure they have trusted Christ and Him alone for their salvation. If they are trusting in their deeds for righteousness before God, then they will have failed the test. Thus, Paul's final words, "...unless indeed you are disqualified."

The KJV says, "...except ye be reprobates." This translation is unfortunate. The word "reprobate" gives the Calvinistic concept of one who is a moral miniscule who is destined for hell. This is not the intent of these words. Rather, the Weymouth translation gives a good sense of what Paul intends by saying, "...unless you are insincere?" Other translations say something like, "...unless you fail the test." In that instance, the words "fail the test" mean to fail the test of sincere faith.

In this verse, Paul is speaking less of works to prove one's salvation than that of true faith which can endure times of testing. It is unfortunate that so many Christians find it necessary to add to the concept of being saved "by grace through faith" by claiming that deeds are necessary for saving faith. The only deeds that should be accomplished are those deeds which are "of faith."

To understand this, Hebrews 11 gives a long list of such deeds by stating something like, "By faith, this person did this or that." The things they did proved their faith through an internal process, not an external one.

Life application: To be saved one must have faith in the gospel. Our righteousness is based on the works of Christ, not in our own deeds.

Heavenly Father, help us to grasp that we are saved by grace through faith and that there is no deed which can add to our righteousness. Rather, such a deed can only internally prove that our faith in the work of Jesus stands. We don't doubt that our parents love us, nor do we doubt that our friends have accepted us. So why should we doubt that our Lord, who demonstrated His love for us by dying on a cross, has accepted us. He asks us to have faith in that deed for our righteousness. Help us to get this settled in our minds! Amen.

But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified. 2 Corinthians 13:6

In verse 3, Paul noted that they "seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you." Rather than merely seeking a proof that he and his fellow apostles are in Christ and fully capable of demonstrating the power of Christ towards them, he asked them to examine themselves. As much as looking for the power of Christ in Paul, they needed to determine if they were even in the faith.

How could they rightly discern the source of Paul's power if they couldn't even determine if their own faith was sound? This is why he then admonished them by saying, "Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?— unless indeed you are disqualified."

Now come his words to them based on this, "But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified." In doing their own self-examination, they will then be able to discern the Source of Paul's words and actions towards them. They will know that it is Christ speaking in him. This entire line of thought follows so well with his previous words to them from Chapter 2 -

"These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. ¹⁶ For 'who

has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ." 2 Corinthians 13-16

Life application: Just because someone is a believer in Christ, it does not mean that they have the gift of discernment. There are preachers in a thousand denominations. Do they all have discernment? Obviously not, because many come to entirely different conclusions on the same spiritual matters found within the Bible. For each of us to be able to discern what is correct and what is not, we need to do our own inward tests concerning our faith, and we need to know the Bible ourselves. It is impossible to imagine that we have time for dinner out, nightly TV, football games, etc., and yet we don't have time for reading our Bible and attending Bible studies.

Lord God, it is so hard to imagine that we have time for everything imaginable, but yet never time to study Your word. We attend sports outings, we watch TV every day, we are constantly taking photos of our last evening out or our recent big adventure, and yet we don't take time to read Your word, attend Bible studies, and so on. Is all of the temporary fun we pursue worth standing before You with empty hands? Help us to focus on what really matters to You. After that, all of the other things will find their proper place. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 13:7

Paul has been discussing his need for discipline when he comes. And along with this discipline must come a demonstration of his apostolic powers. Before his arrival though, he asked them to examine themselves. His words of the last two verses said -

"Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. ⁶ But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified."

They are to conduct a self-evaluation to see if they are actually disqualified. Having said that to them, he now says, "Now I pray to God that you do no evil." His correction through the use of his apostolic powers implies that they are doing wrong. However, he would rather have them do right and there not be a need for that power to be wielded. In its use, he and those with him would certainly "appear approved." This word, approved, is set in contrast to the word "disqualified."

If he appeared approved, it would settle all the matters concerning the charges of the false apostles levied against him, and it would be a real positive note concerning him, but he would rather simply have them do right and let the charges against him stand. As he says, "...that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified."

To him, it would be preferable for the Corinthians to think whatever ill they wanted about him if they were living properly. It was of higher value to him that they were approved and doing what is right than it would be for him to have a good name and a seemingly perfect reputation. This type of humility towards those he loved is seen elsewhere in his epistles. A remarkable example is found in Romans 13 -

"For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, ..." Romans 9:3

Life application: Are we willing to humble ourselves if it means that those who are weaker in the faith will be brought to a position of sound doctrine and right living? What value is our esteem in others' eyes if they are not living right? Rather, wouldn't it be better to be lowered in the eyes of those who are living for the Lord than to be esteemed by those who are not?

Lord God, this world is filled with a seemingly endless set of challenges ahead of us. We get past one and then comes another. And even if we handle them all well, we still have the biggest one of all ahead of us - our own demise. No matter what we do, we cannot get past that roadblock. It is the same end for the wealthy and the beggar, for the do-gooder and the wicked. But thanks be to God for the One who is there through the daily challenges, and who has also gone before us even in the greatest of them. Thanks be to God for Jesus our Lord who is the Breaker of all bonds! No fear here. Jesus has led the way! Amen.

For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. 2 Corinthians 13:8

With a cursory reading of this verse, it appears that Paul is speaking as a person who is incapable of working against the truth. We would then see it comparable to the words ascribed to George Washington which say, "I cannot tell a lie." Although this is a noble way of looking at it, Paul's words are more intense than that. They are somewhat comparable in type to the words of John the Baptist when he said, "He must increase, but I *must* decrease" (John 3:30).

The "we can do nothing against the truth" isn't speaking of his personal abilities so much as that of the power of the Holy Spirit in him as an apostle. In essence, "I have no ability to work the power of my apostleship against the truth (because of the Holy Spirit in me.)" Thus, the reciprocal is also true - "I only have power to work in accord with the truth in my apostolic ministry (because of the Holy Spirit in me.)"

As a man, Paul had the ability to lie or to sin in any other way. But when he was exercising the powers of his apostleship, this was not possible because the Holy Spirit is God and can in no way work unrighteousness.

Paul's words here demonstrate that when he comes and makes judgments to enforce the standards of the church, his actions will be perfectly just. This is not because he is perfect, but because the Holy Spirit who would speak through him is.

Life application: Today, many claim they have the powers of an apostle or some other Holy Spirit designated ability which then elevates them to a position of power within the church. Some go so far as to say that when you speak against them, you are committing a crime against the Holy Spirit. Reject such people as perverse and stay far away from them. The Bible is written. It is our source for determining if someone is speaking the truth concerning God or not. Such fools will be dealt with by God. But for now, let them play alone in their own deluded funhouse.

Heavenly Father, You are marvelous in all Your ways. By Your wisdom, You made the coconut tree and the bald eagle. You have given us sweet scents and delightful tastes. From Your wisdom come the changing seasons and the rains from the skies. You have given us iron in the ground and beautiful shells that come from the ocean. To ponder Your majestic workings will take all eternity because You are the Source of all wonder. Praises be to You, O God. Amen.

For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete. 2 Corinthians 13:9

These words follow logically with what he just said in the previous verse. Paul is speaking of the spiritual state of the Corinthians. If they are spiritually strong, there will be no need for a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power through the apostles. In essence, they will appear weak because everything is AOK. Should the Corinthians be weak in their walk, then they would need to be "strong" in the use of their apostolic powers.

Therefore, this contrast is given not as any physical strength/weakness, but in connection with spiritual matters. In such matters, he says that "...we are glad when we are weak and you are strong." More than just being a state of proper functioning, it was a point of gladness for Paul. And this should be the truth with any pastor.

If he has a spiritually strong congregation, then his job of teaching them should be rather easy. If he has one that is dysfunctional and spiritually misguided, then of course it would be a point of mourning and constant strife. How happy is the pastor then who doesn't need to be "strong" in exercising his knowledge and authority, but rather to be "weak" in appearance because of the strength of his congregants!

Pastors then, like Paul here, should say, "And this also we pray, that you may be made complete." This should be the goal of every pastor. Paul looked for growth and spiritual adulthood in those he ministered to.

The word for "completion" in this verse is *katartisis*. It is only used here in the NT and means "preparing" or "making fit." However, there is a corresponding verb found in the NT which is used by Matthew and Mark to indicate the mending of fishing nets. Thus, it gives the idea of restoring something. And this is exactly what Paul has been working towards in the Corinthians; a restoration of spiritual health.

It is true that all pastors should look for a mature congregation who are spiritually healthy and able to conduct their own lives well, but some pastors actually want the opposite. By having a congregation of spiritually weak people under him, he can then exercise control over them. This can even lead to dangerous cults. If those who listened to Joseph Smith were properly educated in theology, they would have abandoned him and there would be no Mormonism today. Instead, the world is filled with this aberrant cult.

Life application: If you are in a congregation where you are not being instructed on the deeper tenets of theology, you may need to find another church. Doctrines such as the Trinity, the human/divine nature of Jesus, election, predestination, sin and repentance, and so on should be regularly brought into Bible studies. These are not rabbit trails, but are foundational issues which need to be taught and understood by all congregants.

Glorious God, with the introduction of a new day comes all sorts of possibilities. We don't know what lies ahead. There could be good news, fun, and fulfilling work ahead, or there could be tragedy, loss, and grief. And so now, as the future unfolds into the present, help us to trust You each step of the way and to be confident that all things are

known to You and that You have them all under control. Be with us and guide us. And thank You above all for the surety of a good-end for us because Jesus leads the way. Even if the road is bumpy, it is leading to a wonderful place of peace. Amen.

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. 2 Corinthians 13:10

The words here are given with the greatest humility. They are not so much of an apology as many take them, but rather they are simply a statement of fact. "Therefore" is given as a summary of his words since verse 1 (and even inclusive of other verses where he has promised to use his authority if necessary). "I write these things being absent" shows that he truly intends for his words to be read, accepted, and acted upon before he comes. It is his hope that his words while absent will be sufficient to bring about all necessary correction within the church.

"Lest being present I should use sharpness" defines what will be necessary if the letter doesn't have its intended effect. In this clause, the word translated as "sharpness" is an adverb. Therefore, Vincent's Word Studies suggests that to give the force of the adverb, it should read "deal sharply." If dealing sharply is necessary, it will be "according to the authority which the Lord has given me."

This means his apostolic authority. It is based on his selection by Christ as the Apostle to the Gentiles and it will come with a demonstration of power and of the Holy Spirit. Paul is hoping that this will not be necessary, but should it be so, he will use it "for edification and not for destruction."

It is neither the intent of Paul, nor the desire of the Lord, to destroy a church. Nor is it even to destroy those in the church who are not walking according to the word. Rather, it is always desirable to find correction and repentance within the body. The seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation make this abundantly clear. Only when such edification is not found will stronger actions be effected.

It is notable that what Paul says in this verse has already been addressed by him in chapter 10 -

"For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed—⁹ lest I seem to terrify you by letters.¹⁰ "For *his* letters," they say, "*are* weighty and

powerful, but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible." ¹¹ 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." 2 Corinthians 10: 8-11

There he spoke of his actions being for "edification and not for your destruction" and he noted that the tenor in his letters was "weighty and powerful" but that when present he seemed "weak." Paul has clearly shown that this will not be the case if it is necessary.

Life application: It is always preferable to build up and to edify rather than to destroy. This should be the goal in our lives for strained friendships, difficult work situations, trials within a church, and for other such reasons. Let us always endeavor to be peacemakers when possible.

Heavenly Father, help us to be people who will build up one another rather than tearing each other down. Too often, we find offense in things and seek to destroy fellowship rather than spending the extra time and effort to heal it. It is so much easier to simply walk away from a problem and let it implode, but in the end, nothing can replace a restored friendship and harmonious living. So, help us in this Lord. Amen.

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:11

Paul begins his final words here with the statement, "Finally, brethren, farewell." First, despite all of the problems associated with the church and all of the questions about their walk and the application of proper doctrine among them, he never questions their salvation. Instead, he counts them as "brethren." It is a reminder of his continued proclamation that if someone is saved, he will remain saved. He never questions this.

Secondly the word "farewell" is literally "rejoice." Charles Ellicott notes that it is the standard way that Greeks parted, and so the word being translated as "farewell" is acceptable and makes the word understandable to an English-reading audience "if only we remember that it was used in all the fulness of its meaning. 'Rejoice—let that be our last word to you.'"

After this, he petitions them to, "Become complete." He is asking them to listen to the words he has written and apply them to their lives. In doing so, the dysfunction and disorder which they continued to experience will be taken away. In turn, they will be a properly functioning and healthy congregation where all things find their correct place. He is petitioning them for wholeness in their life and conduct before the Lord.

"Be of comfort" is what will naturally result from accepting his counsel and acting upon it. There are promises in the gospel which go beyond salvation. They lead to harmony in this life and rewards in the next. In order to secure those things, a right application is necessary. If this is accomplished, then this comfort Paul petitions for them will be realized.

"Be of one mind" is a goal that he has directed them towards in both of his letters. For us, it is by applying all of Scripture to our lives. When we are united in God's word, then we will be of one mind. In a united mind, the pitfalls which he noted in 1 Corinthians 12:20 will be avoided. Instead of those things, there will be harmony and they (and thus us!) will "live in peace."

Living in peace comes from being of one mind and it is a blessed state that all believers should work for in this life and which they should anticipate with all their hearts because it is a foreshadowing of the true peace which will be realized when we are gathered to the Lord. If this is the goal of the congregation, it will permeate their lives and be a mark of the true Christian fellowship which is often lacking because of personal strife and ambition.

The verse closes with the words, "...and the God of love and peace will be with you." According to Scripture, God is love. Therefore, we are to emulate Him. In so doing, He will be among us in an intimate way. As God doesn't change, then His love neither increases nor decreases. Rather, it is we who move in relation to Him. His love will be realized more fully when we are loving towards each other and towards Him.

He is also the Author of peace. Therefore, in pursuing peace, harmony, and contentment, we will be emulating Him. He will be with us, and He will bless us for pursuing this blessed state. This final clause is a conditional one then. The "God of love and peace" being with us is dependent on our actions. When we are filled with strife, backbiting, anger, and contention, His presence will not be there as it should be. But when these are put aside and we pursue love and peace, His presence will permeate us and our fellowship.

Life application: If we want peace, then we need to be peacemakers. If we want to experience love, then we need to receive God's love and share it among one another. Let us pursue this with all of our hearts, knowing that a portion of our rewards and losses at our judgment will be based on these things.

Great God of love and peace, help us - the people of Your pasture - to be of one mind and to live peaceably towards one another. Grant us the desire to not be backbiters or people who crave division and disharmony. Instead, give us hearts that are willing to yield our heart to one another and to You. The world is so filled with strife, but we can have a place of peace in our congregations if we are directed toward Your demonstration of love and peace which came at the cross of Christ our Lord. So, help us in this, O God. Amen.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. 2 Corinthians 13:12

Paul just said, "Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you." Continuing on now in the hopes they will follow that advice, and in order to promote the general good of the congregation, he tells them to "Greet one another with a holy kiss." This was, and still is, the custom in many parts of the world. The kiss is intended as a greeting just as western nations today shake hands or possibly hug, depending on familiarity. In the Far East, a deep and respectful bow is given in substitute of this.

Although Paul's letters are prescriptive, intent must always be considered. Is Paul mandating that all people in all churches meet one another "with a holy kiss?" The answer is "No." The reason why this is important is because there are small pockets of churches that mandate this even today and even in western societies, such as the US. However, the intent of the kiss of greeting is cultural, not merely biblical. Proof of this follows from the first kiss noted in the Bible in Genesis 27:26 when Isaac blessed his son Jacob before he departed to Padan Aram.

From that point, the kiss is seen among the covenant people and among those who aren't yet in the covenant, thus demonstrating the cultural nature of the greeting. It is used in the same way we use a handshake. When Jacob met Rachel, without knowing her in any familiar way yet, he kissed her. In 2 Samuel 20, the following exchange begins with a kiss of greeting and ends in death -

"Then Joab said to Amasa, "Are you in health, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that *was* in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not *strike* him again. Thus he died."

-2 Samuel 20:9, 10

In 1 Samuel 20:41, David and Jonathan, close male friends, gave a fraternal kiss in accord with the culture before departing. And Proverbs 27:6 notes the following –

"Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend,
But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful." Proverbs 27:6

This demonstrates clearly that the kiss is cultural because even enemies will kiss rather than shake hands. This is seen in these parts of the world today when leaders who are at war with each other still greet one another with a kiss. Exchanging "kisses" with "shaking of hands" in this Proverb would hold exactly the same meaning and intent.

And as a premier example of this, read this exchange between Jesus and Simon the Pharisee -

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which *are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little." Luke 7:43-47

And of course, the most famous kiss in history is recorded concerning Judas' betrayal of Jesus and reflects the sentiments of Proverbs 27:6 (above) perfectly.

It is important then to understand the cultural nature of this admonition by Paul lest we get swept up into legalism over something which is actually not intended for all cultures and in all situations. If a person with an immune deficiency were to use this verse in a prescriptive manner, he could soon be dead from receiving the germs of others.

Finally, the kisses in these and other verses throughout the Bible which are between men and men (such as David and Jonathan noted above) are not in any way intended to convey the perverse sin of homosexuality as modern liberals often imply. They are merely cultural and welcoming displays just as handshakes are today. To imply this in their writings shows a disregard for God's order in the natural world.

Paul ends this thought with, "The churches of Christ greet you." This carries on the warmth that has been transmitted so far. He has gone from personal greetings, to

personal recommendations for continued harmony and love, and has finished with extended greetings from many others. He has been careful to show that the bonds of Christian love extend out in all ways and to all those who are believers.

Life application: If you are in Rome, do as the Romans do. If you are in Japan, do as they do. It wouldn't be appropriate to go to church in the Far East and attempt to hug, kiss, or even shake the hands of another unless they first offered. If you are in a mid-eastern area, a fraternal kiss may accompany a greeting. In America, a hearty handshake and maybe a friendly hug is the custom. The intent of Paul's words is promoting warmth and harmony between believers, not causing offense.

Lord God, how grateful I am to travel the world and to see so many different cultures that worship You in their own way while still exalting the wondrous work of Jesus. It shows me that You truly are the God of the nations, and He is Lord over people of every race, creed, and culture who have set their hopes In You through His finished work. The songs differ, the layout of the meeting places varies, and the way prayers are conducted are unique, but when the Son is exalted, You O God are glorified! Amen.

All the saints greet you. 2 Corinthians 13:13

As the letter begins to close, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are still beloved by the members of the other churches. In other words, he hasn't maligned them in any way, and he hasn't led them to believe that the church in Corinth wasn't worthy of their greeting. Instead, he notes to those around him that he was writing to the Corinthians, and they in turn asked for their greeting to be passed on to them. It is a sign that Paul had presented the church at Corinth to them as a group of fellow Christians.

The first letter to the Corinthians ended with the statement, "The churches of Asia greet you." Now, when ending this letter he says, "All the saints greet you." It is of note then that wherever he was, he considered all of the churches and their members as a part of the greater church-universal. It is his intent to ensure that they felt this bond of the greater family through his words.

Life application: It is important to not divide what God has joined together. When a church is in right standing with the Lord, they should be considered as brothers and sisters in Christ. Lesser doctrinal differences are to be expected, but those who hold to proper orthodoxy in the greater issues should be treated with the kind respect which Paul shows in his letters to the churches that he addresses.

Heavenly Father, help us to be appreciative of, and kind to, the various churches we may encounter in our travels. As long as the main issues of doctrine are held to, help us to overlook some of the lesser points we may not agree with - types of music, form of worship, small differences in opinion about issues which are debatable. Help us to be friendly and accepting of those who have called on Christ, building them up and treating them just as He would. Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen. 2 Corinthians 13:14

This is the last of the 257 verses of the book of 2 Corinthians. Paul ends this marvelous epistle with words reflecting the nature of God revealed in the pages of Scripture; that of the Trinity. Charles Ellicott notes that, "It is not without a special significance that the Epistle which has been, almost to the very close, the most agitated and stormy of all that came from St. Paul's pen, should end with a benediction which, as being fuller than any other found in the New Testament."

The words are rich and alive. They reflect both a prayer of blessing and a hope for the ending of the strife and division which so permeated the church at Corinth. And so, he begins with, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." Normally, words describing the Trinity do not begin with Jesus, but with God (implying God the Father). However, the thoughts are inverted here.

The order he has chosen is important to Christian theology because it shows that there is really One God revealed in three Persons without any inequality between the three. If there were, Paul's words would be most inappropriate. However, this shows that they are truly co-equal within the Godhead. His words, rather than noting any distinction, are given based on priority of thought. He wants, first and foremost, to highlight the "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" one last time to them.

Grace is one of the great themes of the Bible. Man is fallen and man needs grace for his salvation and for his continued walk with the Lord. Paul asks for this marvelous blessing to be bestowed upon his audience. In this petition, it is understood that they are undeserving of it. One cannot merit grace. Therefore, the petition is one of hope that this unmerited favor "of the Lord Jesus Christ" will continue to be lavished upon them - sinners already saved by that same grace.

He next focuses on the "love of God." The term "God" here is certainly speaking of "God the Father." This is evident by the naming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in

the same verse. Albert Barnes describes the words of this clause - "The love of God brings salvation; imparts comfort; pardons sin; sanctifies the soul; fills the heart with joy and peace; and Paul here prays that all the blessings which are the fruit of that love may be with them."

This logically follows "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" in order because one cannot truly experience the continuous and eternal stream of the love of God without first being reconciled to Him. It is through the grace of Christ that this occurs. Though it is also an act of the love of God, without receiving the grace by faith, one cannot continue in the love of God. However, once the gift is received, the love of God will be realized and revealed in.

Paul's final words of the epistle close with, "...and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen." The communion, or fellowship, of the Holy Spirit is something that not all believers fully experience. One is sealed with the Holy Spirit upon belief (Ephesians 1:13, 14). At that moment, they receive their guarantee of eternal life and they receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. They will never receive "more" of the Spirit.

However, this doesn't mean that they will experience the fullness of what they have received. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul tells us to "be filled with the Spirit." In the Greek, it is an imperative, but it is also in the passive. This means that we are not actively, but passively filled with the Spirit. This then means that He will fill us as we yield to Him. This is done through prayer, praise, worship, fellowship, and study of His word. It is through these things that we are "filled" with the Spirit. We have all of the Spirit we will ever receive, but He can get more of us as we yield to Him.

In yielding, we enter into fellowship with Him. It is this blessed state which Paul prays will come upon his audience at Corinth (and thus us!) as he writes to them. It is something they were surely lacking, but something that his letter of love to them hopes for. May it be with us as he has prayed for them!

The final word "Amen" is apparently missing from most early manuscripts and therefore many scholars suggest that it is a later addition by a scribe. Whether this is so or not cannot be precisely determined. No matter what, it is something that Paul would have surely said in his heart, even if it was unstated with his pen. It means "So be it," and this would have been Paul's fervent desire for them.

Life application: You have now made it through 257 verses of the book of 2 Corinthians. You are next admonished to carefully evaluate the coming book of Galatians; a book

which contains 149 wonderful verses of doctrine for our understanding. Stay tuned as we prepare ourselves for that journey by relying on the very benediction which has been bestowed upon us by Paul at the end of this marvelous letter, 2 Corinthians.

Lord God, is it too much for us to get up each day and spend a good amount of time in Your word before we start our other activities? Is it right that we spend so much time playing on social media, watching TV, going to sports games, and otherwise frittering away the time while neglecting Your perfect gift of love and learning for us? Help us to get our priorities right, even now O Lord. Help us to faithfully reach out and pursue Your superior word. Be pleased to bless us as we pursue You. And should You fail to bless us for neglecting Your word, then isn't that a just note of censure? If so, then give us wisdom to learn from it and take it to heart. Amen.