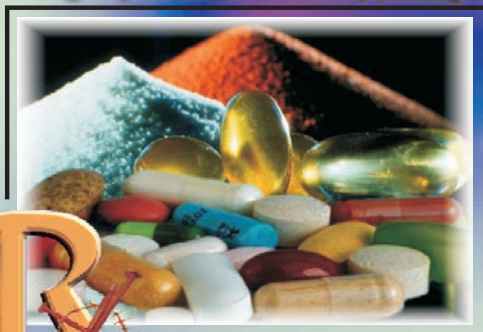


2nd Corinthians



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Second Corinthians

by Abe Lincoln



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Second Corinthians
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This book is dedicated to
Dot Lincoln Gibson,
a faithful and loving helpmeet.



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Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a world-wide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now in printed form that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students, thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a videotaped course. The voice track of the videotape was first transcribed then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Bible Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil

Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, and to the staff of Sunset Translation Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

In addition to the English version, this book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible study library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders and grow churches that plant other churches.



A companion workbook on the study of Second Corinthians by Abe Lincoln is available for purchase through Sunset International Bible Institute External Studies: 1(800) 687-2121.

Introduction to Second Corinthians

2 Corinthians 1:1-12

Welcome to a study of the great book of 2 Corinthians.

Authorship

Paul refers to himself by name in verse one: “*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.*” Considering the fact that he has mentioned his name here along with the fact that the letter, style and vocabulary is Pauline, the external evidence for his genuineness is very, very strong. Polycarp, a pupil of the apostle John, lived from A.D. 69 to 156, quotes from the book of 2 Corinthians. Two other early writers also quote from this letter. Timothy joined his beloved brother Paul in the salutation, showing that he was with Paul at the time of writing.

Background

Having sent the first letter to Corinth, Paul became exceedingly anxious as to its effects. It seems that Titus was sent to the church, and he did not return as quickly as Paul desired. So, the apostle, being greatly downcast, crossed the sea from Troas into Macedonia where he met Titus. In 2 Corinthians 2:12, 13 along with chapter 7:5ff and the latter part of chapter 7, we learn about the attitude of Paul and his great care and concern for the spiritual welfare of this congregation.

When Titus arrived he informed Paul about some of the false authorities at Corinth who were attacking Paul's motives, integrity, character and his apostleship. Paul then wrote this

letter after having spent some time with Titus. The letter was written to silence this bold and unscrupulous minority by answering all the charges against the apostle. They accused Paul of being changeable, of not being able to make up his mind, of being a yes and no man (1:15ff.). They accused him of self-commendation in chapter 3. Chapter 10 and also chapter 11:6 make reference to some of these accusations against Paul. They said that he had a very insignificant appearance. In 2 Corinthians 10:10 it says, "*His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive . . .*" They said Paul was lacking in eloquence, "*. . . and his speaking amounts to nothing.*" So this epistle expresses in depth Paul's attitudes and strong feelings about his ministry in the Lord.

Purpose

The purpose of the epistle, seen in the first seven chapters, is to explain his ministry. This describes the kind of ministry one has in the new covenant. In this section Paul will clear up some of the misunderstandings about his intended visit, and how he dealt with a penitent man, 2 Corinthians chapter 2. Then his glorious ministry will be discussed. In chapters 8 and 9 there will be the urgent plea for the church to complete their giving. They had purposed to give, and now Paul admonishes them to get on with the completion of what they had willed or purposed to do. In chapters 10 through 13, the last section of the book, there is a defense of Paul's apostleship and an exposure of these lying or false apostles.

Paul will give at least four proofs of his being an apostle of Christ. First, he will say the Lord appointed him, 2 Corinthians 10:8 and 13:10. Then he will make reference to his successful labors as an apostle, particularly in chapters 3 and 11. Paul will also allude to his special revelation in the first ten verses of chapter 12. Then he will make reference to the signs of an apostle as being his credentials, 2 Corinthians 12:12.

When Paul writes to the church in chapters 1 through 9 he is very tender, loving and affectionate. He refers to the majority

of the brethren who were striving to be faithful to Christ. When dealing with the false teachers, beginning in chapter 10 and extending to the end of the book, Paul becomes very strong and even severe. In dealing with different kinds of problems, Paul approached each with a different attitude and disposition, although he was still Christ-like in all his attitudes. In chapter 1 Paul works through the problem of adversity.

Overview

An overview of the letter begins here in chapter 1 as Paul introduces himself and some of the experiences he had—even in Asia. Paul talks about the burdens that he had for the church and some of the other experiences that he had in the gospel. He describes his consolation and excitement in his ministry in and for the Lord. This will start in chapter 1:8 and extend through the end of chapter 7. Then there are two chapters that deal with the principles of grace and giving. Surely today it can be learned how to be appreciative of God's grace and how to allow his grace to motivate to give the way the churches in Macedonia had given. This part of the study begins in chapter 8. Next Paul deals with the false teachers beginning in chapter 10, and then in the last few verses of chapter 13 is the farewell that Paul gives along with one of the greatest benedictions of the New Testament.

Recipients (1:1)

In chapter one Paul's salutation to the church can be considered. He identifies himself, and then he identifies the addressees—all the brethren in Achaia. The latter part of verse one says, "*To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia.*" Achaia was the province, and Corinth was the capital city. We know of at least three churches in the Achaian province.

The church of Athens is seen in Acts 17, showing how the Lord built His church through the preaching of the gospel that Paul presented. A number of people responded and the church

was established in Athens. Then Paul goes to Corinth, and later on we read of the church at Cenchrea in Acts, chapter 18. Phoebe is seen as the special servant of the church from Cenchrea. Cenchrea was a little town on the outskirts of the city of Corinth. So at least these three churches are known of in Achaia. Paul said, “I am addressing these remarks to the Lord’s church, God’s family, in Corinth together with all the saints throughout Achaia.”

Greeting (1:2)

Notice Paul’s fervent prayer for the brethren: “*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” What a meaningful but brief prayer! Today it would be a very helpful and meaningful prayer to pray that God’s undeserved favor, a right relationship, or peace from him and from the Lord Jesus Christ would attend us.

Praise to God

Paul’s foundation of gratitude begins in verse 3ff. “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . .*” Other versions may say “blessed.” The word “eulogize,” comes from the word blessed which actually means “to say good things about.”

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion (or mercies) and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles (or our affliction) so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our

sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Notice the basis for Paul's thankfulness. He makes reference to at least three things. First of all, he said that there is the God of comfort. What was Paul's secret of victory as a servant of the Lord, as he experienced all of these pressures and all the trials that came upon him daily? His secret was God. When we are hurting and are tempted to give up, we need to get our attention off ourselves and off our pressures and problems. We need to focus our devotion and our faith upon the Lord. We need to praise Him because He is God. Peter makes a similar statement of praise for God in 1 Peter 1:3-5 when he says,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

God must be praised because He is God. He must be praised because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He must be praised because He is the originator of mercies, and because He does not give us what we deserve. In considering God's mercy and His grace, it is seen that God is so gracious that He does not treat us with the things that we deserve.

The God of Comfort

He is the God of comfort. This word comfort is combined from two concepts in the original language—*para* which means "alongside of," and *kaleo* meaning "to call or summon into one's presence." To be comforted means that God will assist us, that he will help us and strengthen us, and that he will stand

by our side, for the purpose of encouragement. How does God really comfort us? There are at least three ways that the New Testament and the Old Testament teaches of God's comfort. First of all, comfort comes just by His very presence. David, in Psalm 46:1, said that God is a very present help in trouble and He is near us and He is with us. God can be trusted. Then God's comfort is described in the reading of Romans 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 (the entire context but particularly 1 Thessalonians 4:18). The apostle said, "*Therefore encourage each other with these words.*" So, the Lord also comforts His children through His message. He comforts them through or by His servants as well. Paul talked about being spiritually depressed because he had not found Titus when he was at Troas. He even went on into Macedonia to find him. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7:5,

For when we came into Macedonia this body of ours had no rest, and we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.

The Lord uses His people, His servants, to comfort us. Therefore, along with the apostle Paul, we praise our God for being the Father of mercies or compassion and for being the God of all comfort. What an encouraging message it is to know that God stands beside us to encourage us when we have pressures upon us.

In the context of chapter 1 verses 4ff, is seen the purpose of God's comfort. Paul said,

. . . who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

The aim of adversity or pressure is to strengthen us. But

the fact is we do not always live and walk by faith. We sometimes walk by appearances as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5. Many times there is difficulty in accepting that the aim of adversity and pressure is to strengthen us since our faith is not as strong as it needs to be. Hopefully faith will be increased through the study of this great epistle.

The Blessing of Adversity

The word “trouble” denotes suffering due to the pressures of circumstances. Jesus, during His personal ministry, was under constant pressure. We can see how the Lord endured daily pressures in Luke 12:50 and John 11:33-38. This word trouble, includes physical suffering, but it also includes mental, emotional and psychological pressures in life. In regard to our Lord in the book of Hebrews 2:10, 5:9 and 7:28, it can be seen through these passages that Jesus was perfected in His sufferings. Jesus reached the goal that the Father had set for Him, and He did it through affliction. So, another purpose of affliction or trouble is the capacity it produces to minister unto others.

There is the assurance of a high priest who is Jesus (Hebrews 2:4). He is capable of helping us, and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities because He endured suffering Himself and was tempted at all points as we are tempted. So since our Lord has experienced the same trouble that we have experienced we can now trust Him and turn to Him since He cares for us and has conquered these trials in His life. Paul says in 1:4 that we learn through our trouble that we are to be a strength or a comfort to others. We are so trained by our affliction or pressures that we can lead others to the strength that comes from our trouble. Comfort or strength is the aim of such trouble, and trouble is therefore an advantage, not a disadvantage.

In chapter 12 Paul was driven to the grace of God by his physical weakness. He had so matured in Christ that he said he was taking pleasure in his weaknesses and infirmities so that he

might be driven to trust in God's sustaining grace. Therefore, Paul said that these weaknesses made him strong through Christ. Our consolation or comfort overflows if distresses or pressures be our lot. It is the price we pay for such consolation. Paul says that the strength we have to face all of our pressures and trouble with fortitude is the same kind of suffering that we endure for Christ. Now consider Paul's hope for the church at Corinth in 1:7. If the church is faithful to Jesus, they will become partners in the sufferings of the gospel. We cannot escape some of the pressures we have because we belong to Christ. In 1 Peter 4:12ff we learn that if we are faithful to the Lord and endure such sufferings for Him and with Him, then we will have a part in the divine comfort.

In 1:8-9 Paul shares with us some of the burdens and trials in his ministry. The apostle says:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened (now notice) that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Then he praises God for having delivered him, and he points out that God is still delivering and that in the future He will continue to deliver. Paul illustrates his point of the previous context by his own experience and continues to show the purpose of such hardships or trouble. It is not known when Paul suffered this affliction. However, in going back to Acts chapter 19, and reading about the riot mob in the city of Ephesus, which was in Asia, Luke tells us about all the pressure that came upon Paul. It is not known whether Paul is referring to this or to some other similar kind of experience that he had in Asia, but in any event Paul describes the seriousness of it. Note again, in verse 8, that the burden of these events

were “. . . *far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.*” They were completely without a way to escape. Death looked them right in the face, and a way out could not be seen.

This question is asked: “You mean that Christians today, and God’s public servants like Paul get pressured and even distressed?” Yes. The Lord and the apostles experienced such things and so do we today. “Well, does such experience serve any purpose?” Again in verse 9 it is seen that this experience was to teach us not to place reliance on ourselves, Paul said, but instead on God who raises the dead. God allows troubles to come our way, but since God desires that we trust Him completely, He knows that we will learn to rely upon Him. “*On Him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, . . .*” (2 Corinthians 1:10). Again, this is the perfect tense which means that Paul had fixed his hope on God in the past, but was continuing to do so at the time of this writing. Such experiences help to overcome temptations and pressures, such as pride and self-reliance.

There is a parallel passage in Romans 5:3-5, where we learn that good things happen through our pressures and trials if we trust God. James said the same thing in James chapter 1. He said, “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, . . .*” (James 1:2). James didn’t say it was a joy to experience trials, but did says to count it as joy,

. . . because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:3-4).

He then goes on in the next verse (verse 5), to say that wisdom is needed to understand all of this, and if wisdom is lacked then we need to request of God who “*. . . who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*” So when these pressures and trials come upon us, we

must pray for wisdom. It must be asked in faith so that we will know that God is at work in and through us, and that He is maturing us and perfecting us into the likeness of His Son.

Trust in God

In the experience about which Paul has spoken in 1 Corinthians 1, Paul found a new trust in God. He always trusted God, but he found a new trust in God. Paul Butler, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians comments on this verse. He said, "It sounds paradoxical that strength will come from an attitude of physical weakness, and without God in the equation, of course, it would be a contradiction." He referred to Friedreich Nietzsche who was a German philosopher in the past, who scoffed at such a doctrine. His trust was in what he called the autonomy of man. He made reference to the death of God and did not have respect for the power and the nature of God. He believed the only good in the world came from man's will and man's power. In reference to this is the fact that Nietzsche's contribution to the world was a disciple named Adolph Hitler. When God is left out of the picture, and only human wisdom and power is considered, this is what can occur. Dependence on God is easy to talk about, but it is difficult to really do.

Many of us trust him and depend on him as long as circumstances are prosperous and our health is good, but true faith should be able to overcome our feelings when things are not going well. Christians must help one another in such times, and Paul is trying to help the brethren at Corinth by having shared these passages of scripture with them. In 1:10-11 Paul said with regard to God,

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor (that was Paul's deliverance here

in the context from whatever this trial was) *granted us in answer to the prayers of many.*

Notice that Paul speaks of his two-fold deliverance. God first of all, and the Christians also, had a part in this deliverance. Paul said that God will continue to deliver if you will cooperate by praying for us. The word “help,” as used in this passage, means “to help together.” One word study says it means “to pile up work together” or “to aid along with another.” Our Father makes more secure, and deepens our relationship to Him, when we show Him our complete dependence and trust in Him. This was shown by prayer. Paul said that with so many disciples praying for their deliverance and since God has delivered, there will be many to give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor God has shown toward them.

Preview of Lesson Two

In 1:12- 2:4, there is an explanation for Paul’s delay in coming to Corinth. In verses 1:12- 20 Paul said,

Now this is our boast; Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace. For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus. Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice (That is have a second visit with the brethren). I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea.

When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no?' But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No.' For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not 'Yes' and 'No,' but in him it has always been 'Yes.' For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Paul's Defense of His Person and Ministry

2 Corinthians 1:12-2:17

In 2 Corinthians 1:12ff. Christ is referred to as the “Amen” spoken to us by the glory of God. Paul states in 1:21-22,

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Paul makes the claim in 1:12 to be very genuine and sincere in his faith in and love for the Lord. The brethren were suspicious of Paul because he had promised to visit them and had not done so. They were now questioning his integrity and his sincerity since some had impugned his character. Therefore Paul defends himself, and this had to be done, not just for his personal satisfaction, but for the sake of his ministry. He would not allow the ministry of Christ to be falsely accused in any way because this was the very ministry in which he was involved. Paul's life and ministry were not for personal glory or gain, nor were they motivated for covetousness or pretense.

Paul Defends His Integrity (1:12-2:4)

Paul's character and career were his best defense. Paul said in 1:12, “*Our conscience* (one's mind that passes judgment upon one's entire life, service, thoughts, words and deeds according to a rule) *testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the*

holiness and sincerity that are from God . . .

Paul was living according to Christ's example and commands. He said that his conscience ought to have assured them that all of his dealings with them and all his conduct was covered by a devout and godly sincerity. Paul acted toward the brethren as God had acted toward him. He acted with grace and not with a worldly attitude or wisdom of carnality.

In 1:13 Paul said that there was nothing in their letters but what the Corinthians could read and understand. The word "understand" means to perceive. Earlier in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul stated that his words were simple, plain and direct, so they were therefore understandable. He was very clear and straight to the point. Many times unity is dependent to a large degree upon proper understanding of words. When there is a clear understanding of what the Spirit meant by specific words, which are signs of ideas, then we can understand what God intended for us to understand with those specific words.

Reason For Paul's Delay

Paul talks about his purpose as well as his postponement in coming to Corinth. He had said that he would come if it was the Lord's will (1 Corinthians 16). Paul's original purpose, as stated in 1:15, was based upon the Lord's will, as stated in 1 Corinthians 16:7. His delay was not intentional. He said he was "minded" (this word means a continuous action of being willing or desirous to visit), having planned to visit the brethren, or even possibly have the benefit of a second visit. He challenged them to give evidence from his conduct that he was unreliable or double minded. Paul always kept his word. He was not a "yes and no" person. That is he didn't say yes from one side of his mouth while saying no from the other. When Paul was obliged to change his plans, it was neither a mark of weakness nor evidence of dishonesty. In 1:18-24, Paul gave a defense of his word. In 1:18 and 23 Paul appealed to God as his witness. This is the same thing as being under an oath. When Paul said, *"I call God as my witness . . ."* he made a solemn

oath which is proper and right for God's servants to make. Sometimes it is necessary to place oneself under an oath when the situation is serious and important. A study of oaths can be continued in the sermon on the mount, Matthew 5-7 and James 5, in which are stated certain kind of oaths in which we cannot participate. However, if the occasion is serious enough and demands it then we can certainly take God to witness that we are speaking the truth. God is the one that started making oaths, and swearing by himself since there was none greater.

Christ's Guarantee

Paul uses some commercial and legal terms to prove his "word" in 1:21-25. These words are "seal" and "earnest" or "deposit." Paul said that the gospel that he preached was reliable and positive, and so was the messenger of that gospel—Paul himself. The absoluteness of Jesus' words and actions verify that God keeps his word because Jesus has always fulfilled his promises and his word. Whatever Jesus promised then or promises today in his will was always answered and will always be answered with a resounding "Yes!" The ultimate "Yes" of God was Jesus' resurrection which was verified with historical facts. Christ is the "Yes" pronounced upon God's promises. Every one of them is a "Yes" of God. Because God has confirmed his trustworthiness in the historical act of raising his Son, men may have assurance and respond with a hearty "Amen!" The word amen means "Truly," "So may it be," or even, "That is correct."

The Spirit's Guarantee

To every promise of God Paul states that he is reliable by appealing to the guarantee or the seal of God's Spirit. One responding to the cross in gospel obedience can be compared to the response of the people who heard the sermon in Acts 2:36-41. These people heard, believed and responded to the truth of the gospel. At that point of being immersed into Christ unto the remission of sins, they were promised the gift of the

Holy Spirit. When they were convinced that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, and that they had murdered the Son of God, they asked, "*Brothers, what shall we do?*" The apostles responded in Acts 2:38, "*Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.*" That literally means to be baptized on the basis of your assurance and faith in Jesus as the Messiah, both Lord and Christ. That is the only basis that would cause a man to repent and be immersed on the basis of his faith. If you do this unto or with a view to the remission of your sins, "*And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" A disciple receives the gift of the Holy Spirit from God in conjunction with the Word of God. The Spirit actually indwells our spirit which is in our body, and this Spirit has become a seal and an earnest unto us. An actual seal was an engraving made in the likeness or in the image of a king or ruler. A seal marked documents and objects. It is similar to our notary seal today. There are many seals, for example: If you make a deposit at the bank today, you must be sure that the teller puts the seal on the bank deposit slip. If the paper doesn't have the date and the seal of the bank on it, then there will be no proof that any money was deposited. A seal is very important, even in the business world. A seal was also an emblem of ownership or authentication. Every time our President speaks there is a Presidential seal on the stand to show that he is the genuine and authentic President of our country. The seal is obviously important. They have it on the President's plane, and even on his stationery. Everything has the Presidential seal. There is a purpose for these seals. Paul has alluded here to the fact that he has been sealed by the Holy Spirit of God, therefore this ought to confirm that he is a genuine, authentic servant and apostle of Christ.

As we grow in God's grace, we become transformed into the image of God's Son by the power of God's word to transform our minds (Romans 8:5ff). In Romans 12 Paul states that we are not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we might prove

what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul writes,

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

This passage discusses the transformation that takes place as we look into the glory of the Lord, as seen in the New Testament, and as we become more and more like him. In the latter part of 2 Corinthians 1, to be sealed by the Spirit means that we received the Spirit as a seal when we became a Christian. Therefore when Paul was baptized into Christ by Ananias he received the Spirit as the seal. Later on he was empowered as an apostle by the Spirit, but he received the seal of the Holy Spirit as all disciples receive that Spirit when they receive the gospel. It seems, however, that in this context Paul is saying that to be sealed by the Spirit is simply to have God's image imprinted upon our character and our life. The Spirit also becomes a deposit, a pledge or an earnest to a Christian. Ephesians 1:13 and 14 is a parallel passage that teaches the same truth. So Paul stated that because he has been sealed by the Spirit as an earnest and because he has been sent out by the Lord as his servant, then his word can be confirmed as genuine and trustworthy.

Paul's Guarantee

In 1:23-2:2. Paul said, "*I call God as my witness . . .*" This is the final proof of his trustworthiness. He places himself under an oath that what he is saying is truth. He states, "*that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.*" Paul wanted to spare them a sharp rebuke, and he preferred to send them this epistle and send men like Titus and Timothy rather than to come and share a visit with them that would not be one of joy but one of sorrow. So Paul explains to them why

he postponed his plan. He didn't believe that it was the will of the Lord for him to go then. He wanted to spare them an unpleasant and sharp, rebuking visit.

"Not that we lord it over your faith, . . ." A key thought was that they could not domineer over others and force people to believe. We can set forth the evidence and the testimony. However, faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. We can't force people to believe. Paul said, "I can't force you to accept what I have said." He said,

Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm. So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears . . . (2 Corinthians 1:24-2:4a).

Paul was being supervised and led by the Spirit, and yet the Spirit enabled him to express his own inward feelings and even inspired him to say these things. Paul, while writing, wiped away the tears from his eyes. *" . . . not to grieve you, but to let you know the depth of my love for you"* (2 Corinthians 2:4b).

Restoration of the Penitent Offender

Paul then responds to the report of the church at Corinth in 2:5-11. He discusses the response of the immoral man (2:5) and the action of love and discipline. This man was truly penitent, and was restored to the Lord. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 says,

If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent--not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted upon him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm (to validate) your love for him. The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven--if there was anything to forgive--I have forgiven in the sight (or in the face) of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

The Principle of Majority Action

In 2:6 the majority of the brethren at Corinth understood and believed what Paul had written in 2:5. The majority of the brethren said, "We will pass the test," and Paul makes reference here to the genuineness of their faith. They said, "We are going to carry out the will of the Lord with regard to turning this wicked man over to Satan so that the man might repent and turn away from evil and come back to the fellowship of the Lord." The fruit of their action was repentance by the man!

This is a passage that can be used today. When we teach what the will of the Lord is, then, the brethren may be asked, "Are we, or are you, persuaded to do that?" The majority of the brethren say, "Yes!" This is not the majority deciding what the gospel is, and what the doctrine of Christ must be. It is the majority deciding in a congregation as to whether or not they are going to be obedient under the Lord's will. When the majority makes such a decision, then the decision must be carried through. The minority must not be allowed to make a decision for the congregation. Therefore, as bad as Corinth was, they still had the majority of the brethren committed to

doing the will of the Lord. So they turned this wicked man over to Satan because he was serving Satan and was no longer in fellowship with the Lord. The apostle said that the spiritual punishment inflicted upon him by the majority, was sufficient for him. This process works, and we need to believe that, even today. We need to believe that we can take action in love and in kindness, not with any self-righteousness on the part of God's people, but in genuine concern. When we do this against people whose lives have caused them to no longer be in fellowship with the Lord, they are brought back to Christ! When they are taken away from the strength and the warmth of loving fellowship, they become aware of the nature of their sins. In this passage this action is referred to as spiritual punishment by the majority, and it was sufficient.

Forgiveness

Paul says that there are three things the brethren ought to do. First of all, "You are to forgive the person, as I have, in the very presence of the Lord." The word, "forgive," means to saturate with much grace, or to show grace or kindness to a person by forgiving him. When the Lord forgives us, he treats us as though we have never sinned. We need to reassure people today that when they are forgiven by the Lord, we forgive them as well. We have a problem today in regard to giving, (1 Corinthians 8,9) but an even greater problem among us is that of forgiving. Colossians 3:13 teaches that we are to be forbearing and forgiving toward one another even as God and Christ have forgiven us. We must learn how to treat other people in exactly the same way that the Lord has treated us, that is without any bitterness or resentment. The Corinthians were to forgive and forbear this person, even as the Lord had forgiven the brethren there. They were to treat him as though he had never sinned.

Comfort and Affirming Love

In the next place, they were to comfort him. This means

to put heart into him again, and that is to encourage the person by standing by his side for the purpose of encouragement.

Then Paul said that they needed to confirm or assure him of their love for him. "*Reaffirm your love for him*" (2:8). There must not be any doubt at all as to whether or not the church of the Lord loved him the way the Lord loves him. Paul said that the purpose in all of this was to keep this brother in fellowship. "We are not ignorant of Satan's devices," Paul said. This fellow could be overcome with excessive sorrow. Many times when people sin as this man did, they have difficulty forgiving themselves. Paul said that he needed to be given to godly grief and sorrow, which had accomplished its purpose, but he doesn't need to be given to excessive grief and sorrow. That would only work against him instead of for him. So, the brethren were to do these three things: Forgive him, comfort him, and confirm their love for him.

Proof of Obedience

The purpose of Paul's first letter (1 Corinthians 5), as Paul alluded to in 2:9, was to determine whether or not they would stand the test. They fully accepted Paul's apostolic authority, and they carried out the will of the Lord. Paul stated that they had now stood the test that he had spoken of in 2:9, "*The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.*" Then in 2:10-11 Paul speaks of forgiveness.

Concern for the Church

Next he refers to the coming of Titus. Paul had great care and concern for the spiritual welfare of the church and deep anxiety to be with Titus and to hear about the state of the church at Corinth. In 2:12-13 he states,

Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found the Lord had opened the door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find

my brother Titus there. So I said good-by and went on to Macedonia.

In spite of a great open door for the gospel of Christ, Paul said, "Because of my deep care and concern for the spiritual welfare of God's family at Corinth, I had to meet Titus." Therefore, he went on to Macedonia.

Gratitude for Victory

In 2 Corinthians 7 Paul met Titus in Macedonia. He got a good report from his co-worker and Paul's joy is expressed over and over again in that context. He got a good report from Titus concerning the welfare of the church. They had corrected the most significant mistakes and errors in the church life at Corinth. So Paul was grateful, and he expressed thanksgiving for the victory that God was giving in His church. Notice 2:14-17:

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

Paul's thanksgiving for the Lord's victory is evident in this passage.

Purpose for Discipline

Today, when we see problems in our lives and the problems in the lives of fellow disciples, we should not despair. Realize that they are spiritual problems, and there is a right and

proper way to work through them. It always involves finding out what the will of the Lord is. God corrects many problems through the teaching and the application of His Word. That is what had happened in Corinth. The brethren were puffed up and proud, 1 Corinthians 5:2, and they had repented of that evil attitude. The majority said, "We will take action. Spiritual punishment has to be practiced on this occasion." The Corinthians had changed, and the good effect that the first letter to the Corinthians had upon the church at Corinth may be read about in 2 Corinthians 7:11ff. There were proper vindication, grief and sorrow on the part of the church and also action on their part. Paul had a sudden change of mood from being downcast to joy when he heard about how the church responded and how this brother, that had been withdrawn from, had responded. Then Paul gives the instructions in chapter 2 to strengthen the penitent man. The context shows that Paul was thanking God for the victory of the Lord's church over their sinful, proud attitude (1 Corinthians 5:2). Not only that, but he was thanking God for the victory that God had given through church discipline. Paul uses the illustration of a Roman triumph in 2:15-16.

We must look over and over again at the purpose of corrective church discipline. We must be sure to do it out of love, and deep esteem and respect for the Lord and His will. We must be sure that our attitude is right, and that we go to a brother (Galatians 6), looking to our self lest we also be tempted. We must go with boldness but in kindness. We need to practice, as they did, corrective church discipline. God, through such a process of spiritual punishment, will give us victory over Satan today. 2 Corinthians 2 is not to be lightly regarded concerning church discipline. It had a positive effect for the church in the first century and it will have a good effect for the church today if practiced correctly and consistently.

The Glorious Ministry of the New Covenant

2 Corinthians 2:14 - 3:18

In 2 Corinthians 2:14 Paul said,

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

Paul was obviously referring to a Roman triumph with which the people in the first century, who were under the yoke and the dominion of Rome, would be quite familiar.

The Triumphant Nature of Ministry

Think of Christ leading his faithful servants, preachers and teachers of the gospel, who have become a beautiful fragrance and an aroma of Jesus, into all the nations of the earth with the gospel of Christ. To those who reject it, it is an aroma of death.

The highest honor which could be given to a victorious Roman general was a triumph. To attain it he must satisfy certain conditions. He must have been the actual commander in chief in the field. The campaign must have been completely finished with the region pacified and victorious troops brought home. Five thousand of the enemies, at least, must have fallen in one engagement. A positive extension of territory must have been gained, not merely a disaster retrieved or an attack repelled. The victory was to be won over a foreign foe and not in a civil war. In a Roman triumph the procession of the

victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the capitol in the following order: First came the state officials and the Senate, followed by the trumpeters. Then were carried the spoils taken from the conquered land. For instance, when Titus conquered Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the seven branched candlestick, the golden table of the shewbread and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome. Next came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships. Then followed the white bull for the sacrifice which would be made. Then the captive princes, leaders and generals walked in chains, only to shortly after be flung into prison or in all probability to be executed almost immediately. Then came the lictors bearing their rods followed by the musicians with their lyres. Next were the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. After that the general himself came standing in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was clad in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over that he wore a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he held an ivory scepter with the Roman eagle at its top, and over his head the crown of Jupiter was held by a slave. After the general rode his family, and finally the army came wearing all their decorations. They would shout in triumph to the general—their cry of triumph. The procession, decorated in garland, moving through the streets amid the cheering crowds made a tremendous day of which might only happen once in a lifetime! That is an expressive account of a Roman triumph.

Paul made application of the Roman procession and said that the risen king Jesus leads his preachers of the gospel, like Paul and Titus and others, in an awesome procession through the streets of this world. To the victors comes the perfume of joy and triumph, but they are few and are distantly separated from one another. To the wretched prisoners or the condemned, the gospel is the scent of death. It is the aroma of impending doom. This makes the pilgrimage of the preacher of the word of God on earth a sometimes lonely and even isolated journey,

but it makes it a victorious one. We should not become discouraged in our effort today to lead with our Lord's help and to strengthen people out of the bondage of sin into a right relationship with God. Preachers have little time for frivolity or for foolishness. They have no time to waste on trivial things. They walk in a procession of life and death. To most of those who are walking with them their message smells of doom, and they are not appreciated or even welcome. Those dead in sin are surprised that there are men of God who take their work with such seriousness. Those who spend their leisure hours in reveling wonder why preachers choose to miss out on the "good life," as they say, and living in lasciviousness, passions and carousing. 1Peter 4 speaks of the way we all lived our lives, and we spent way too much time in that kind of evil environment and practice. However, now we spend the rest of our days to the glory of our Lord and his service.

Noah condemned the world by his preaching, and he wound up practically alone (Hebrews 11:7). He saved only his own family. Jeremiah was alone in his preaching (Jeremiah 5; 11:8-15, 18, 20). The truth preached exposes sin for what it really is, and the world that loves sin will hate the servant who preaches against their evil practices. The Lord tells us in John 3:19, 21 that the world loves darkness and doesn't want the light penetrating upon the nature of their lives. Those who are intellectually honest want the evil of sin exposed to be able to see sin for what it really is. Then they are able to see the consequences of sin so they can then turn from it and turn to the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Anyone who does all of that and who also proposes to follow Jesus in the ministry of God's word must be willing to count the cost, and a part of that cost on occasion is loneliness. Some in the Corinthian church had evidently wandered from the faith far enough that even to them the preaching of Paul had become a fragrance of death. Paul was feeling the depressing loneliness of their antagonism even toward himself. Notice Paul's feeling of insufficiency in 2:16, "*And who is equal to such a task (or calling)?*" When

we consider such a ministry to be a life or death ministry, we respond with Paul by asking these things. “Who is confident and adequate?” Paul answers this question in 3:4 by saying that such confidence as this is only through Christ before God.

The Accredited Nature of Paul’s Ministry

In 2:17- 3:1, Paul repeats his commitment to sincerity,

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?

The church has every right to expect unfailing standards of personal integrity and conduct in their spiritual leaders, such as preachers, elders, or any public servants of the Lord, so long as those requirements conform to the Scriptural demands. Paul, in this context, has reassured the brethren that his demand is to be faithful to the Lord. He demands himself and the brethren require him to be dedicated and faithful in the handling of the word of God and also in adorning or decorating in his own life with the teachings of Christ. However, congregations could demand and accuse on false premises, and that seems to be the situation in regard to Paul. Paul states very emphatically that he is not hawking or peddling the gospel. The word “peddle,” or “corrupt” signifies a huckster, one who is marketing something dishonestly for material profit. Paul defends himself, “We are not like many who put the best fruit on the top to hide the inferior or rotting fruit underneath. They make a public show of the gospel, but all of their hidden inferior motives are underneath.” Today there are many self-appointed religious men who hawk the message for their own financial gain. However, Paul was sure of his own integrity, sincerity and

purity. The word “sincerity” in this passage (2:17) means “pure, as tested by sunlight.” His ministry would stand against the hot penetrating rays of the sun. It was open to the light and could be seen by all to be morally pure. Paul’s ministry would stand against the very x-rays of God himself. Paul says he is, “*Unlike so many . . .*” It is grieving that there were many who were peddling the word of God.

The Glorious Nature of Paul’s Ministry

Paul also speaks of the glorious nature of his ministry in 3:2-5:21. He states the kind of ministry that he was a part of, in his service to the Lord. This section is one of the greatest sections of this book. It deals with the menace to the gospel and the problem of Jewish legalism. In 3:2-5 Paul recaps the results of his ministry at Corinth,

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tables of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Some had questioned and even denied Paul’s credentials as the Lord’s ambassador because he had no letters from the Judaizers out of Jerusalem. (Paul will refer to himself as an ambassador of Christ in chapter 5). Some had come to Corinth with letters and were received by the church. Such false workers had gone into the church at Corinth, and into other Gentile churches as well to undo and destroy God’s work through the gospel of Christ. Paul’s response was that no letter

of endorsement could produce eternal life and freedom or liberty, which the Corinthians had possessed through Christ and the word of the cross. Hebrews 10:1-4 makes painfully aware that the first covenant could not cleanse one from sin, nor could the law itself and the sacrifices of the first covenant take sin away. It took the blood of Christ. Jewish legalism could not cleanse the conscience or produce spiritual life in the heart. The law of Moses produces doom and death. The sinner needs grace which comes through Christ and the power of his sacrifice on the cross.

Paul's Letter of Recommendation

Paul tells the brethren that they are all the "letter" he needs; a letter written on his heart. Paul states that it is plain that the church is a letter that has come from Christ given to us to deliver. The church is a letter, not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God as we preach Christ crucified. It is written, not on stone tablets like the Ten Commandments, but on the pages of human hearts. The church at Corinth proved that Paul was an approved servant of God. Their spirit and lives were plainly seen, and others could see it for themselves. The message of Christ and his death becomes fixed upon the heart of the Christian, and the very nature and character of the Christian is seen. It is a challenging and serious thought to know that each Christian today is a living letter, known and read by our associates. Men judge our Lord by the living letters we write. The saints at Corinth were Paul's verification, and they were read by all men. 2 Corinthians 3:3 is written in perfect tense, which means that Christ had been written on their hearts in the past, with a continuing result. This alludes to their initial obedience to Christ when Paul came and preached there (Acts 18), and they were continuing in the way. Paul states that no human being with a ton of letters from the Jewish fathers is able to produce righteousness in a sinner. Such claims can only be made in full reliance upon God through Christ (3:4-5).

Jewish legalism is an attitude that demanded justification from God on the basis of having kept a code of rules. Legalism doesn't mean that we are not to adhere to the teaching of the Word of God. However, a person can look to certain rules and rituals as a means of conduct, and not see the source of them as God. In other words, it is altogether possible to be like the Pharisees who trusted in commandments and trusted in themselves while they kept commandments and set all others at naught. We keep the commandments of our Lord today as an expression of our love, and there is no way to express our love apart from His commandments. However, while we observe what the Lord has willed for us to do, we must be sure that we are trusting in the Commander and not just in the commandments. We must trust in Christ as our sin offering while we walk in the light (1 John 1:7), and while we show our love for God.

A Basis for Confidence and Competence

The Pharisees are a good illustration because the false teachers who had come to Corinth were perhaps pharisaical in their background and in their concept of the Old Testament law. The Pharisees took the law of Moses and through their own interpretation made a code of behavior, and this code was called tradition. For example, they misunderstood what God meant by the Sabbath law. They criticized our Lord for the work that he did on the Sabbath, although He never violated any law concerning that day. He only violated the traditions of some of the scribes and Pharisees. They declared that they were justified because they had kept the law, when they really hadn't kept the law. They had merely kept their traditions. Paul gives all the credit for the church of the Lord at Corinth to God. Legalism, Jewish legalism or any other kind, never gives credit where credit is due. The Jewish legalists today want all the honor and all the credit for themselves. Grace, undeserved favor, is anathema (a curse) to such people. In 3:4-5 Paul makes it clear,

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Paul asserts that God in Christ was the basis of his success.

A Contrast of the Old and New

The new covenant of this ministry is described more in depth in 3:6-18:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit (that is, the new covenant of our Lord) be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (liberty). And we, who with unveiled faces all

reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Paul said that what they were preaching was not just the letter of the Old Testament law, but of the Spirit's revelation of the New Testament, that is, the new covenant. "God," Paul said, "has qualified us to dispense his new covenant." In Galatians 2:16 Paul stated,

. . . know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

The Law of Moses, and the law before Moses, were given by God, and provisions were made in such a law for faith. That is very important, because people were justified by faith before the giving of the Law and after the Law. God made provision even during the time of the Law of Moses for faith. By that faith, which involved devotion to God in every effort to serve him, one could be justified. The Law condemns and leads to separation from God and leads to death, because man cannot and does not keep the Law. Why would anyone look to the Law as a means of justification when he has transgressed the Law and stands condemned or convicted by the Law? Man is guilty of the sin of transgression of the Law, and the penalty is death, not life. However, as seen from the Old Testament, God started forgiveness and justification by a total merciful deed of his own to all who believed.

In Romans 3:21-26 Paul stated that the New Covenant is different from the Old, and God was altogether just in cleansing us through the sacrifice of his son. Those of us who have faith in the blood of Christ He has justified freely through grace, and now we live under a different kind of law. What

kind of law? A law of works? No, it is a law that involves faith and trust in our Lord. It is a law of faith, which is a principle that involves trust and confidence in Jesus' sacrifice as we obey. These verses in Romans 3 teach us that the Law and the prophets bore witness to the justification that is found through the sacrifice of Christ. All those in the Old Testament who trusted the coming grace of God through the cross were saved and justified by faith, and they lived and walked by faith. Quoting from Habakkuk 2:4, Paul says in Romans 1:17, "*The righteous will live by faith.*" It is from faith to faith, Paul said. Life starts with faith, continues by faith and ends by faith. If one under the law trusted in his legal standing according to the law, he never got salvation. The new covenant holds forth for one the word of life. If one refuses the gift of life he will die away from God because all men must accept the law of faith. If a person doesn't accept the pardon that is found in the law of faith, which is based on Christ, and involves trusting in His sacrifice, then he would be making a statement that he is justified by a system of law. The book of Romans shows that people would be justified by the law under which they were living or to which they were amenable or subject. Paul has affirmed in this great chapter that the law was a ministration of death.

Paul makes reference to the glorious ministry of the new covenant. The law of Moses was a dispensation of death inlaid or carved on deteriorating stone. However, since it was from God, it had splendor or glory. All of God's dealings in history are glorious, so the Law was glorious, but temporary from its beginning. It was destined to be fulfilled with what has permanently come into existence as a permanent covenant of law. The first covenant was deteriorating and was to disappear. When Moses descended the mount (Exodus 34:29ff.), having been in God's presence, his face was shining. This was external, but it was shining. If it were with splendor (Paul said it was), how much richer in glory must the covenant of grace that brings righteousness be? This accompanied the

dispensation under which we are now condemned if we are looking to the law as a means of our justification. The church must not allow false teachers to come in and bind the old law upon them and diminish the glory of the gospel of Christ.

Courage for the Conflict

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul said that the law of Moses, with its legal systems of law and works had no permanent splendor or glory in comparison to the New Covenant of our Lord. We respond to the cross and the word of the cross by faith. Our response makes evident our trust in the sacrifice of the Lord, and by faith, to repent of our sins, and to confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10). By faith we are immersed into the benefits of His death, which leads to obedience to the cross. However, all systems that advocate justification on the basis of law-keeping are without the glory of God (2 Corinthians 3). Justification by faith and trust in Christ is God's permanent, most glorious covenant of grace. This was known in the mind of God from the foundation of the earth (1 Peter 1:20 and 1 Corinthians 2:4ff.). Revelation 13:8 helps us to better understand the eternal purpose and mind of God in the matter of justification.

Fading Glory

In the book of Exodus, Moses put a veil on when he spoke to the Israelites. He had been with God forty days, and demonstrated the brightness of God's glory during that period of time. When he spoke to the Israelites, he put a veil upon his face so the people could not see the end of the glory that was fading away (2 Corinthians 3:13.) Paul said that the old covenant had passed away like the glow on Moses' face. Unfortunately, some of the people did not understand the temporary purpose and nature of the first covenant. The Old Testament predicted that the old (or first) covenant was to be

done away. The prophet said in Jeremiah 31:31 that the day was to come when the first covenant would no longer exist. He said that it was temporary and would pass away, and that there was a new covenant to come. Hebrews 8 makes application of Jeremiah's statement and shows the fulfillment of it in Jesus. Daniel 7:24ff. also talked about the passing away of the first covenant and the bringing in of the new covenant of our Lord. Most of the Jews then, and many even now, refused to believe this. The Jews of Moses' day were not able to understand the fading glory of Moses' relationship to God, and this is why Moses covered his face. The Jews in Old Testament times killed the prophets for predicting the fulfillment of the Old Covenant in the New Covenant, and they crucified Jesus for teaching the same truth. The gospels show us that this was the response of many to the ministry of our Lord.

Removing the View

In 2 Corinthians 3:14-15 Paul teaches that Jewish legalism hardens the mind. Some false teachers with a Jewish background (identified in chapters 10 and 11) had come into the church, and had hardened the minds of some in the church against grace. The veil over Moses' face was a symbol of the hardening or the dulling of the minds of the Israelites in their rejection of Christ. This word "blinded" means hardened, and was used to denote petrified skin, like a callous. Even centuries after Moses, whenever the law was read in a synagogue, a veil was laying upon the hearts of the people, and they became satisfied with a legal system of justification by law. Paul said this same kind of hardening in opposition to Christ and his church was going on in his day, and it is going on today. However, in 3:16-17, the apostle shows that people are free only in Christ, and when everyone turns to Jesus and the cross, the veil is removed. Men who are enslaved in law and legalism will have none of this mercy and freedom, for their law does not acknowledge a need for mercy.

Reflected Glory

2 Corinthians 3:18 has a practical meaning in our Christian maturing and growth,

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

We learn that the new covenant message does not merely reflect God's glory from the outside, but it radiates His glory from within. Our defense against this type of Jewish legalism, or any other kind of enslavement, is a gradual process of transformation into His likeness; that is, the same image or likeness of Jesus. Paul said that we are being transformed, and he used the present middle tense (Greek) which means repeated action. When we look into the word of Christ there is a metamorphosis taking place. A form is changed beyond what it was, from one degree of glory to another. God foreordained that we be conformed to the image of His son (Romans 8:29). So when we look into the light of God's word, this enables us to partake of the Lord's divine nature. Peter made reference to our being partakers of the divine nature in 2 Peter 1:3. "*And we, who with unveiled faces . . .*", this passage is in perfect tense, that is, some action was completed in the past and is now having present results. This passage indicates that the unveiling was something done to us by someone else. Our unveiling is through the agency or work of the Spirit, but how has the Spirit of the Lord made the glory of our Lord visible to us? The answer is clear and certain: Through the Spirit's message, the gospel of Christ. In the matter of conversion, the matter of sanctification, or being led by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit works and operates only through the word of truth.

In Acts, the Holy Spirit never converted anyone directly, but indirectly through the preaching and the teaching of the gospel of Christ. That is how we are brought from one state of

glory into another, more and more into the image of Christ. Romans 8:5 speaks of what is involved in minding the things of the Spirit and walking after the Spirit. The Spirit has revealed God's word, the message, through the apostles and prophets. The Lord predicted that in John 14, 15, and 16. John 16:13a says, "*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.*"

This is the work that the apostles were to do through a preaching and teaching ministry. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2 that they (the apostles) had received the word of God. That is how God called them through the gospel of Jesus Christ. They regarded that message not as the words of men but as the Word of God. Therefore, the unveiled face comes as a result of our reflecting or beholding the glory of the Lord. "Reflecting" is a present middle voice participle (in the Greek), means an action that is continuing to happen. That means the believer is continually and constantly looking, beholding the perfect law, and the glory of the Lord. As we continue to look into the mirror of God's word, see and reflect upon the glory of the Lord, and have a desire to be like Him, we are being transformed more and more into the image of the glory of our Lord.

The Honest Nature of Paul's Ministry (4:1-6)

In 2 Corinthians 4-5 Paul's determination and purpose in the ministry is discussed. He talks about his commitment to the kind of ministry seen in chapter 3. 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 says,

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry (this kind of ministry that brings life in Christ Jesus our Lord through the power of His sacrifice), we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the

sight of God.

This is the second or third time that Paul refers to the necessity of a good conscience in God's sight.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Overcoming Discouragement

Paul said, "Brethren if we have this kind of glorious ministry, which is found in the New Testament, we should never lose heart. The message is Christ, Him crucified and the application of His death in our behalf as we live Christ day by day. We must never encourage Satan with discouragement." Discouragement can become a real problem among every Christian, but particularly among public servants of the church. All of us have been disappointed and discouraged. Paul was disappointed by the false ministry of some, and he discusses it in chapter 4. Paul was obviously grieved because of the hardness of the heart of a lot of his fellow Jewish brethren. "Having received this glorious ministry from the Lord," Paul said, "*we never lose heart.*" That's a reaffirmation that we are not going to become dispirited and discouraged. God's mercy had something to do with this attitude (4:1). Notice his commitment to be honest; he said, "*we have renounced.*" This statement is in the Greek aorist tense and means "once for all." They had renounced the deeds that men hide, for the very shame that is involved in their lives and their actions.

Paul had this ministry by God's mercy. The judaizers had their ministry by cunning and disgraceful ways, by tampering with God's word. Paul was once a very dedicated and committed Pharisee and had a good conscience, according to Acts 23:1. However, he did not understand the new covenant of our Lord and did not understand the proper law or measuring device to live by to determine what his thoughts, words and deeds needed to be. Paul recognized that before his conversion he had done disgraceful and shameful things. For example, there is Paul's involvement in the taking of an innocent life, that of Stephen. Acts 7-9 records Paul's activities as the chief of persecutors against the Lord and His cause. Paul participated in secret hidden things, and had distorted the law of Moses and added to it all the pharisaic traditions. Paul certainly knew something of the tactics of the Judaizers of whom he is speaking here in this context.

The Jewish legalists thought that they were making God's way more certain, when in fact they were causing people to forsake Christ and fall from grace. Such Jewish legalism always creates self-righteousness on the part of the people, and that is contrary to one's glorying in the Lord and in His death. We must always have the word of God to follow for a life of holiness through the grace of our Lord. However, when we trust in these guidelines and commandments rather than trusting in Jesus, the source of our salvation, legalism becomes a means of being justified rather than the means of our salvation being through His sacrifice. The Jewish legalists then and today think of themselves as protectors of the Word when actually they are distorting the Word. That was the point that Paul made in this context.

There is a truism involved in 2 Corinthians 4, and it applies to any teacher, even today. In 4:2 Paul said,

*Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways;
we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word
of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth*

plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul was underhanded with no one as a servant of Christ. The responsibility for the seed, the word of God, the germinating and the growing of that seed and the producing of the fruit lies with the soil, that is, the heart of the believer and the seed. We are grieved when people do not respond or when they respond and fall away, but we ought not to lose heart. Grieved as we might be, we are not to lose heart; We are not to quit.

The Reason Some Fall Away

Paul had as his purpose to be open and clear in the teaching and the preaching of the gospel of Christ. If this gospel is found veiled, the only people who find it so are those who are on the way to perdition or destruction. Those willful unbelievers are blinded (aorist tense) once for all in their minds by the god of this age. Paul understood that the gospel had not been received by all, and that even some of the disciples had been blinded to it. Therefore, 4:4 says, *"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* Here the perfect tense is used again, and this means that the gospel had been veiled in the past, completely in the past, and continued to be veiled in the minds of the unbelievers at the time of the writing of this letter. From the context of chapters 3-4 these Jewish legalists, who are binding the old law upon the body of Christ, were laborers with Satan in this work. The unbelieving were in a continual state of perishing; that is, to be utterly destroyed, and because they were seeking to be justified by law they had fallen away from grace. Galatians 2:16 states that one cannot be justified by law. The god of this world blinds through false teaching. "Blinds" means to burn, to smoke or to put up a smoke screen which deceives the minds and makes people not to reflect upon the grace of Christ.

The free gift of God is mercy apart from law and works. God alone is the absolute and sovereign ruler of all, the ruler of all creation including the devil. Satan can't do anything unless God permits it. Therefore, Satan has usurped the place which God should have in the minds and lives of people. Satan is the pretend ruler. Jesus has power over Satan and demons in the gospel. The Lord commanded demons to do everything that He willed. Satan is referred to as a god in this context because some have been deceived by him; persuaded into believing his will instead of God's will. Paul, in Ephesians 2:1-3, talks about the influence that Satan had in the lives of all of us before we were saved. Satan in the context of Ephesians 2 is referred to as the prince, that is, the first rebel. The prince means the first of anything. We say, "He is a prince of a man. Among men He is number one." Satan is number one in the area of darkness and deceit. He is the first rebel and has led people into disrespect and into being rebellious against God. Paul said, "Notice, people are blinded even today from the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ because of Satan's deceits." Paul said in 5: 12, "*We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, . . .*" and the word "*not*" is very emphatic. Galatians 6:11-16 states that promotion of self was the fruit of legalism and self-glorification. Thinking ones self to be justified by works of the law is always accompanied by pride, arrogance, and even conceit. Paul preached nothing of himself among the Corinthians. He always preached Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus was Lord, and the apostles were slaves. We are serving every command of Jesus. Paul never measured himself by himself or by other human beings. Remember what Paul said about such judgments in 4:1-5.

The Suffering Nature of Paul's Ministry (4:7-18)

Paul's source of strength in his ministry is seen in 2 Corinthians 4:7-18,

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that

this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us but life is at work in you. It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Strength Through Weakness

Paul talks about the weakness of our physical bodies beginning in 4:7. This glorious heavenly treasure, the message we preached concerning our Lord, the power to give out the light of the gospel, the glory of Christ, the very image of God—Paul said that we have these in jars of clay. The word clay or vessels of clay describe pieces of baked clay which have been found in archeological ruins. It is something rather fragile. Yet God uses us, fragile as we may be, to get this treasure into the world. This shows that this great gospel power available to us transcends anything of which man is capable.

God selected us to proclaim this message and prove that such transcendent power doesn't come from us but is God's power alone. It would be difficult to overcome our fears and frustrations if we didn't have the precious promises of God. Paul said that we have constant pressure upon our emotions and mind, but God provides the strength and the grace so that we are not crushed.

Life Through Death

2 Corinthians 4:8-12 mentions the conflicts and the paradoxes that occur in this life. However, this section is most reassuring to Christians today, the servants of the gospel. Through all our knock-downs, bumps and bruises, we are more than conquerors. Paul uses that term in Romans 8:28ff, but in 4:10 Paul said that, *"We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body."* Paul is referring to the death to self that Jesus experienced and demonstrated day by day in the flesh. He was in total surrender to the Father's will. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, 5:24 and 6:14:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." "

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Victory Through Faith

Paul, in Philippians 3:10-11, makes reference to the sufferings of Christ and wanting to experience that same kind of attitude and disposition that Jesus had in His suffering. Paul said,

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul, in this context, said that we have all of these emotional pressures, and we have all of the problems that confront us because we teach and preach the gospel of Christ. Yet notice the victory that we have in all these experiences.

In 2 Corinthians 4:13, Paul talks about the spirit of faith. That is the disposition or mind that fills and governs the heart of a Christian. Not just faith, but the spirit of faith, and the spirit of faith issues forth in courage. We not only believe, as David said, but since we do believe we speak. That's the spirit of faith! The spirit of faith gives us victory. 2 Corinthians 4:14 says,

. . . we know that the one that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

That is the victory that the spirit of faith gives us. He said in 4:15, "All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God."

The spirit of faith and the victory that gives us, Paul said, is for our benefit. We will stand with our Lord. We will be with Him in that great and final day, and the spirit of faith causes us to so speak and to so live. When people hear that message they respond by causing thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. One purpose of our ministry is to bring glory and honor to God. We want to be saved through our own faith in the Lord and in His cross. We also want others to hear, respond, and give thanksgiving to God, and to thus honor Him with praise.

The Ministry of Reconciliation (1)

2 Corinthians 5:17 - 6:10

In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Paul discusses the renewed servant, and why he didn't lose heart. This section is very important because Paul talked about the spirit of faith which is the disposition or influence that fills and governs the heart of the Christian. This spirit of faith gives us confidence of the victory that we will have with our Lord in His presence (4:14). It also assures us that God is being glorified through our ministry; through the teaching, preaching and reception of the gospel of Christ, and through the anthem of praise which is offered unto God.

Outward Decay, Inward Renewal

In 2 Corinthians 4:16 Paul writes, *"Therefore we do not lose heart."* We do not become dispirited. We do not become faint hearted. *"Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."* Some of us are outwardly wasting away more quickly than others, but this is the process of deterioration that every physical body experiences. This is occurring day by day, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. There is a key thought in regard to the maturation of a Christian: Attaining perfection and maturity in Jesus. This is the goal toward which each of us is striving day by day. We pray for it, Colossians 4:12. We teach and admonish each another so that all of us might be presented as mature and perfect in Christ. In order to attain that maturity and perfection we have to renew our thinking, our thoughts, and our mind. Paul tells us in Romans 12:2a, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the*

renewing of your mind.”

Paul admonished the Ephesian brethren in 4:23, saying that they should be renewed in the spirit of their mind. Notice how frequently the mind ought to be renewed. Paul said in 4:16 that we are being renewed inwardly and spiritually day by day. It is not just week by week and month by month, but the renewal of our spirit is daily. The spirit of faith enables us to be renewed as we look to the perfect law of liberty. James describes this process as *“being a doer of the word and not a forgetful hearer.”* This man shall be blessed! The Lord is at work in our lives through His word, through worship, through prayer and through providence so that the inward man is being renewed more and more to the likeness of Christ. This spirit of faith not only enables us to be renewed day by day, but it enables us to understand the design and purpose of these momentary light afflictions.

The View Through Spiritual Eyes

2 Corinthians 4:17 says, *“For our light . . .”* What Paul experienced could be expressed as being exceedingly heavy and cumbersome, rather than *“light.”* However, Paul said, *“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”*

Some versions say *“are working for us.”* Notice that they work for us and not against us. The spirit of faith enables us to understand the design and purpose that God has in mind for these light momentary afflictions. We need to be reassured of that so that we can really live and walk by faith when these trials and pressures come upon us. Paul conveyed that these things are working for us because we are not looking at temporary or material things. They work for us, *“an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”*

2 Corinthians 4:18 says, *“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

Although we glorify God in our day by day activities and

functions here upon the earth, we still fix our hope confidently upon the Lord (1 Peter 1:13ff). We continually seek things that are spiritual and from above, and we fix the eyes of our faith on these things. When we stand before the Lord in that final day (5:10), all that will surround us will not be material and earthly things, but will be our naked soul in the presence of God. It will be adorned with either righteousness or unrighteousness. Everything that we see with the physical eye is transitory: It is passing away. Reminding ourselves of that truth helps us to fix our eyes upon the things that are unseen, those things which are eternal.

The Hopeful Nature of Paul's Ministry (5:1-10)

Paul tells us of his yearning for the glorified body, and he discusses the frailty of the body, in 5:1-10, "*Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed . . .*" If we live long enough or if the Lord comes before the appointment of death, we know that our body will cease to be our physical habitat and our spirits will be with the Lord. Then on the final day we will receive the glorified body. Paul said,

Now we know that if the earthly house (or tent) we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile (while indwelling this earthly tent) we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (That is the glorified body.) Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are

away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight (or appearance). We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal (our aim) to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Paul comments in 4:16-18 that the Christian's life is observed and seen through the eyes of the Lord, or in other words, the eyes of faith. Things are seen as God's word instructs them to be seen. Paul looked at the eternal weight of glory. Notice that "now we know" is in the present tense (Greek). We are continuing to know, so therefore the divine outlook needs to be a continuing experience on the part of the Christian. Each day we must look at everything from God's divine perspective, from His viewpoint. That is accomplished by taking our eyes off material and earthly things, centering our eyes upon the word of God, and then allowing the eyes of faith to enter into our heart. Paul spoke of an earthly "tent," and this word is taken from a word that means "down, soil or ground." Man's physical body is definitely of the soil, as seen in Genesis when God mixed a part of Himself with the clay and breathed into the man's nostrils the very breath of life. So our human bodies are like tents, maybe uncomfortable and temporary at best, but at death this "earthly" tent is torn down. Paul maintained that while we are in this house we groan. We grieve and greatly desire to put on or be clothed with our heavenly building.

Paul said, "By faith we walk and by faith we understand that these things are true." We trust the Lord explicitly. We put all of our weight down upon what God has said. We can rely upon the trustworthiness and the nature of our God because He is faithful. That is the theme that is seen from Genesis 1

throughout the word of God.

A New Body

Paul transcended time, and by faith he saw eternity. He said, in the present tense, that we have from God an eternal house in heaven not built by human hands. God has already prepared our heavenly or spiritual body which is one like Jesus' body (1 John 3:1-4; Philippians 3:20). It will be a body like His, a glorified, eternal body. This glorified body is there waiting for us and will be imperishable. It will be powerful, spiritual and eternal (1 Corinthians 15:35-54). Without God's revelation of truth, man fears the death of his body because he thinks of disembodiment, and there is fear. Paul says that we must view death as a time of exposure or dispossession (5:3, 4). He describes the pressures and anxieties that he felt as he anticipated the tearing down of this physical body. Obviously with confidence we face death, but no one is in perfect command of his emotions, that is, to be unafraid of death. The sting of death, sin, has been removed. Therefore if sin is no longer a part of our life, through the power of the blood of Christ, then the sting of death has been removed. However, there is certainly still an emotional fear of the appointment of death. Regardless, Paul says that by faith, we can overcome this great anxiety and fear. Paul's faith was sure and certain because he had a divine outlook and understanding.

When the spirit leaves the body at death, our spirits are immediately with Christ. John the apostle saw the redeemed from the earth clothed in white robes and standing before the throne and before the lamb (Revelation 7:9ff.). At death we get the white robe. When Jesus comes we will receive our glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15). According to 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, we know that our Lord will bring the spirits with Him to be joined to their resurrected body. 1 Thessalonians 4:15ff. says those who will be alive to come to the Lord will not precede those who have already died and gone to be with the Lord. Their spirits will come and be joined to the raised and

resurrected body.

The Spirit's Guarantee

Paul said in 5:5, *"Now it is God who has made us (or prepared us) for this very purpose and has presently given us in this body the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."*

We have a deposit or earnest at the present time which is God's guarantee for the glorified body. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, God gives us the gift of his Spirit to indwell our spirits and our body in conjunction with the word of God and the words of the Spirit. Therefore, the Spirit becomes an earnest, a guarantee. An earnest is the first payment that is made upon the purchase of property, guaranteeing that the rest of the payments are coming. God said that He will give His spirit as an earnest to indwell the body now, which will guarantee that the glorified is sure to come. God is molding, shaping and working for us this very possession. God prepares us for this far better existence by light and momentary troubles (4:17). Do we have this same strong desire as Paul to put on this resurrected body? Although Paul has the spiritual presence of the Lord, as we all have, he wishes to be with the Lord in the glorified, resurrected body.

A Faith Walk

Paul tells us in 5:6-10 that faith gives us confidence as we live each day in Christ and know that we will be with Him in a glorified body one day. While we are in the body, the Lord's presence is not direct and unmediated with us, it is indirect. Nonetheless, in the future we shall have His direct presence. The Father will reach down with His own hand and wipe all tears away from our eyes. We will have a direct presence with our Father and Lord. What an exciting hope this instills within our hearts! This causes us to endure these momentary light afflictions and to look beyond these things. John tells in Revelation 7 and 21:3 through chapter 22 about the direct

presence. The Father will be in our midst. The Lord will be our Father and we will have a face to face fellowship throughout that eternal day.

A Coming Judgment

Having such great hope, we presently have as our ambition or as our goal to please Him (5:9). The word “goal” means to search for honor or to love honor. To believe that all of these things will take place and to be reminded of the coming judgment (5:10) are very important aspects of the divine outlook. The apostle said, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”* The word “appear” means to reveal, to be made manifest or to be unveiled or exposed. This judgment is not a trial since the Lord already knows the secrets of man’s heart. Matthew 25 and other references in the gospels picture judgment as being a sentence where the Lord will say, “Come ye blessed,” or “Depart from me.” Butler, in his comments on this section of Scripture, has some encouraging teaching about the judgment. He says that the judgment will enable each one to be recompensed for his deeds, whether good or bad. Paul affirmed this in 5:10. Judgment will be a personal evaluation given to each individual of what his life has really been like. Paul tells us that we can look forward to the day when the Lord will show us that our “so-called” failures, as we have viewed them or as others have called them, were not failures, but successes. In Matthew 25:31 ff, the Lord pulls back the curtain and shows us what the judgment scene will entail. The servants who had been faithful to the Lord asked,

Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? . . . He replied, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

Perhaps the disciple will not know how successful his living and walking by faith have really been until the day of

judgment. In that day the Lord will reveal many things that pleased Him which no one else heard or even applauded. Everyone who has made his ambition and his goal to please the Lord is going to be joyfully surprised on this great day of exposure. It will be a time of disclosure when all mankind learns perfectly for the first and last time who is right. The evil that men have done and also the attitudes that men should have had while in the physical body will be exposed. What is our goal today? We should live, love and serve Him in a manner that we will please Him.

The Devoted Nature of Paul's Ministry (5:11-16)

The judgment and the compelling love of Christ are discussed in 5:11-16, *"Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience."*

Paul again refers to the significance and the importance of one's conscience. *"We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride (pride which has to do with one's relationship to the Lord and with glorying in Him and in what He has done in and through Christ) in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart."*

This verse enables us to understand one purpose of 2 Corinthians. Paul was saying all of these things so that the Corinthians could answer some of the critics who were questioning his integrity and his character. Paul wanted all of these things answered because his ministry was involved, and if his ministry was discredited and he didn't have integrity and credibility in his ministry then people would not receive his teaching with apostolic authority. Paul was saying all of these things not just to defend himself but to enable the brethren to answer those who glory in appearance and not in heart.

Paul states in 5:13, *"If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; . . ."* Some had said rather slightly that Paul was out of his mind. Paul said if that is so, it is not for his own

selfishness, personal interest and gratification. “*If we are in our right mind, it is for you.*” It is for their edification and spiritual ability.

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those that live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for him and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

Notice the compelling, constraining love of Christ.

The fear of the Lord was taught by Jesus, and he said that there is a proper fear. Matthew 10:26ff says that we ought not to fear him who can just destroy the body, because that’s all he can do. We ought to fear Him who has the power and the ability to destroy both the body and soul in hell. Our Lord and the apostles taught the same truth in such passages as 2 Corinthians 5. There is a holy awe and reverence that we must have for God. Hebrews 12:28 and 1 Peter 1 talk about this kind of fear, reverence and respect that we are not only to attain and maintain, but even grow in as we become mature in Christ. The Old Testament makes the fear of the Lord, reverence and awe, one of the fundamental basic features of holiness. Solomon had quite a bit to say about it in Proverbs 1:7, as well as in Ecclesiastes 12:13, “*Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*”

David also talked about the right kind of fear in Psalm 15:4, 33:23 and 33:8. Paul’s reverence for the Lord motivated him to persuade men. We need a proper awe and fear of God in our lives today.

In 5:12 Paul defends his sincerity in order that the Corinthians can answer Paul’s critics and the false charges against him. Paul said in 5:13, “*If we are out of our minds, it*

is for the sake of God.” This was motivated by a desire to serve God. *“If we are in our right mind, it is for you.”* Paul says that the love of Christ is controlling. Christ’s love controls us, pressures us and holds us together today. It compels us to live and to serve each day to the glory of the Lord.

Paul was convinced that Christ died for all, including himself and us. Paul’s conviction was based on historical evidence, and not just on an emotional feeling. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is the evidence that God has supplied of things not yet seen (Hebrews 11:1). Without the resurrection, the death of Christ as a vicarious atonement for our sins is invalidated. If we have accepted Christ’s death on the cross in our place, we have actually accepted our death. We accept the teaching that our sins put us on the cross. Therefore we died when Christ died, and we no longer live. We have no right to control ourselves or to live for ourselves any longer. Galatians 2:20 emphasizes this truth,

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The Ministry of Reconciliation (2)

2 Corinthians 5:17 - 6:10

Paul referred to dying with the Lord in Galatians 2:20,

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Paul conveys this same concept in 2 Corinthians 5:7, “*We live by faith, not by sight.*” Christians are to live by faith, or by the “spirit of faith” as Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 4. The very heart of the gospel and a discussion of the ministry of reconciliation are presented in this section.

A New View of Life (5:16-17)

Paul said in 5:16 that at one time he viewed spiritual things from a worldly point of view, and even regarded Christ through the eyes of an unbelieving Pharisee. Then he continued this thought by saying, “. . . *we do so no longer.*” A divine perspective is needed to view this world as God does—precious sinners, the lost, the object of His love and Christ’s sacrifice. One should not regard or pass sentence upon the people of the world as the people of the world do to one another. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (or a new creature); the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of

reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The word “new” in 5:17 means “freshly or newly made, new in species and in character.” All the old things are seen as a unit, like a herd. Before Paul discussed the new man in Christ, as he presented it in 5:17, he emphasized how unbelievers view Christ. He even included himself in that in 5:16. The unbelievers think of the Lord as being no more than a mere human being, having no power to exercise authority over man. They reject the deity of Christ and refuse to believe in His atoning death for their sins. One may accept that Jesus was a good religious leader, yet not allow Christ's words to have any authority in his life. The disciples never claimed the right to disagree with Christ and His authority.

In Christ we have all spiritual blessings or benefits, Ephesians 1:3. When by faith one is immersed into Christ (Galatians 3:27), he gains a completely new perspective, “. . . *the new has come!*” The Greek perfect tense is used in this verse. The new came completely at the point of the new birth or coming into Christ, and it is a continuing effect or action. The new creation, which acknowledges Jesus in every way, is a continual growing experience on the part of disciples of our Lord. In 5:18-23, Paul states that the very substance and basis of God being able to redeem us are through the atoning sacrifice of His Son and our acceptance of that sacrifice by an obedient faith or a genuine trust in the Lord's atoning death. That is how it is possible for God to deal with the problem of sin. Sin is a real problem with God because He is holy and

righteous. An adequate and perfect sacrifice had to be made for sin. God could not accept sin, and still be righteous and holy. There had to be sufficient sacrifice made for sin, and Christ was that sacrifice. Paul presents man as a rebel, as a sinner who is God's enemy in his own mind, Colossians 1:21, "*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*"

Anyone who is alienated from or not reconciled to God is against Him. The only way that man can be reconciled or changed thoroughly is through the redemptive work of God in Christ Jesus. This work is the grace of God in action. He took the initiative, and man responds to His love by faith. That is why the New Testament puts so much emphasis on receiving this salvation by faith, and on living and walking by faith. Paul said in Romans 1:17, "*For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'*" He said that all of this is from God (2 Corinthians 5:18). The absoluteness of God's justice must be satisfied, and His wrath must be appeased.

Our Lord in the flesh pleased the Father in Spirit and in deed. Jesus lived the perfect life and kept the law of God completely. As the Lamb of God, He willingly laid down His life for us (John 10:14-18). The Lord said that no man would take His life, yet He willingly and painfully laid it down. The Lord didn't desire to have pain, but He endured it, and He did so in love. He willingly laid Himself down as a ransom for sinners. Paul said in Galatians 3:10ff that Christ became the curse of God in our place. God bruised or punished Christ for all the sins of the ages (Isaiah 53), even when in His foreknowledge He saw us in the 21st century as sinners. God's righteousness and wrath were satisfied. The absolute God was reconciled to man through the complete, wise and absolute atonement of Christ Jesus His Son. We were won back to God through His love and through the constraining love of Christ.

A New Purpose in Life (5:18-21)

In 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 Paul spoke of the ministry of reconciliation. Every disciple is obligated by God's grace to proclaim individually or collectively this redemptive message. We are all co-laborers in the belief and presentation of the good news of God's offer of salvation to all men. God has assigned this function to us, His church. In Ephesians 3 the function of the church is to make all men see the greatness of this system of grace as seen through Christ and His sacrifice, the word of the cross. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul said the church is the pillar and support of the truth that upholds it and makes it known.

2 Corinthians 5:19 denotes continuous or effective reconciliation. Paul said that God was not negative; He was not counting or imputing all trespasses in a ledger book. He does not ascribe sin to those who live and walk by faith and who are in Christ Jesus His Son (Romans 4:3). The only way that God could do this was to take man's sins upon Himself. Therefore, on behalf of Christ, we perform the duties of an ambassador. The word "ambassador" is used in a very orderly or legal sense to refer to when a ruler or a president selects and directly sends an official to represent him. This word is used to refer to the apostles who are sent by Christ. They acted officially as ambassadors, agents or representatives of Christ, and God was entreating through their gospel message. We also are preaching the same message (which we have through revelation) that these ambassadors or apostles preached. We have been sent out directly by the Lord as His official ambassadors to represent God. Just as there are conditions for peace set forth by an earthly ambassador, so it is in the spiritual realm.

Christ was personally without sin and was under no obligation to suffer the shameful consequences of sin. Christ was able to choose whether or not He would participate in our sinful condition, to vicariously become sin for all who are obligated as sinners to suffer death. Christ was not only free to choose, but by His perfect life had the right and power to do so

if He desired to. Jesus said that He came to serve mankind and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). The substitution death of the Messiah was predicted very clearly by Isaiah, the gospel prophet, in Isaiah 53. When one believes the gospel and obeys its truth (1 Peter 1:22), Christ purifies his soul. He is purified and becomes righteous. God added the very righteousness of His Son Christ Jesus to our account. He imputed our sins to Jesus, and when we become a new creation by faith He imputes Jesus' righteousness to us as well. We have no righteousness of our own to boast about, and we are not saved by our own works of merit or righteousness (Ephesians 2; Titus 3-5). God made Christ our righteousness. 1 Corinthians 1:30 says,

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

If anyone is going to boast, let him boast of the Lord. By Christ's perfect obedience many believers are made righteous (Romans 5:19). Our righteousness depends upon faith in Christ (Philippians 3:8-11). This imputed righteousness is retained, provided that we continue in the faith. It encourages us not to lose heart, but to keep on and hold on to our faith. Colossians 1:21-22 says,

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Hold on by faith to the hope of the gospel of Christ, and do not give up. As you think about this ministry of reconciliation, the power of Jesus' sacrifice and becoming righteous in God's eyes because of Christ's righteousness, keep on trusting in this sacrifice and make an honest effort day by day to live and walk in the light (1 John 1:7).

Paul makes a very earnest plea for the brethren in 2 Corinthians 6 and 7. In 6:1-2 he makes an earnest plea for them to seize their opportunities which are found in God's grace,

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

Paul has stated that he is a co-worker with God. We can be co-workers and partners with God! Paul was not just working for God but working with God to keep the Corinthians from falling short of God's grace. If we say we are followers of Jesus, yet we look at people as the world does, and we have an improper view of Christ's death, then the grace of God will have been received in vain (6:1).

Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8 in 6:2 to refute the judaizing teachers. God has only one acceptable time, and that time in Christ is "now." "Now" is the Christian age in contrast to the Old Testament or the Jewish age. The law had accomplished all that God intended it to. It did a perfect job of convicting men of sin, just as it does today. It caused men to seek righteousness found in Christ Jesus and to look for refuge and redemption through a Messiah. Yet Paul said not to be deceived into thinking that something else or something better would come. You must let God's grace in Christ fill you now, not tomorrow or in the future.

Paul says Christ's example must be followed, and so he refers to himself as one who had endured many afflictions and

trials by faith, but by the grace of God he continued to be in a right relationship with the Lord. The need of following Christ-like patterns or examples is seen in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10,

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments, and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

These are biblical paradoxes; which appears to be untrue. Paul said here that we learn and even adopt proper patterns for behavior through examples. A good or perfect example either exhorts us and encourages us or warns us. We should be a credit to others and give no occasion for stumbling. The word "stumbling" means to strike one's foot against or to be a hindrance to another. That is, not even one blot or blemish on the ministry.

Paul reminds them in these verses of the trials and the pressures that he had endured for them. Paul, through his many experiences, was able to commend his ministry to the saints. In all the trials that Paul had experienced he learned to trust God's grace, and he had not quit when life was rough and tough. Afflictions are trials under pressure. When pressured down by circumstances, Paul endured, and so we can endure the

everyday hardships of life—the pressures, stress, and tension that can push one into a corner in which there seems to be no escape. Paul mentions some experiences that he had because he was faithfully following Jesus. These are the things he voluntarily chose for the sake of his ministry: labors, work resulting in weariness of the body and mind; watches, the sleepless nights that Paul experienced; and fasts, being without food. Paul is not trying to receive any pity from the brethren, but he publicly mentions these things to assure them of his love (2 Corinthians 6:6).

The apostle reminded them of some of the tools of his ministry. One was purity of life, to be morally clean. That means that Paul did not indulge in the pollution of idolatry or the immoralities of the Gentile world of the first century. Paul said he was commended in his ministry in knowledge or knowing the things of God. Paul knew so many things through his experiences. He knew them by revelation, and he also knew them experientially. Paul experienced beatings which were stripes or wounds for the Lord. Paul was kind, which carries the idea of being at ease with others and making them to feel at ease without any compromising of truth. Kindness is active, not passive. It means to assist others and to make things easy for people. It doesn't indulge or condone others in wrong. Paul said that he was commending himself in the Spirit (6:6), and we know that the Spirit was empowering the apostles in their work. (Some of the Greek authorities say that the article "the" in "*the Holy Spirit*" is not in the text. They believe that a more accurate meaning could be the neuter noun "a spirit," referring to the apostles' human spirit being set apart as holy.)

The next is sincere love, which is a genuine love, not a play-like love. To genuinely and sincerely care for others when they are really not worthy of such care is a God-like kind of love. He loves us when we do not deserve it and can never merit it; He loves us anyway and seeks our highest good. One of the unique traits of Christianity is its love for truth and the speaking and living of the word of truth (6:7). The heathen

world exalted the achieving of power through deceit or selfishness and any kind of evil practice. God's power and work is seen in these virtues that Paul has mentioned in 6:6-7.

Our weapons in this ministry are not of the flesh (2 Corinthians 10). Our weapons, our methods, our practices and our tools are of God. Namely, righteousness in the right hand and in the left. Paul said that there must never be any underhanded or devious methods employed by God's people, but being most careful to do with is right. In 6:8-10 Paul lists a number of circumstantial contrasts that he had worked through in his service to the Master. It would take great faith and commitment to live through such experiences. There were times when Paul was considered valuable, and yet other times they spoke about him in an evil manner. Not everyone spoke well of Jesus either. In Luke 6:26 the Lord warned about not being regarded as great by everyone, "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you . . .*" Take heed when men speak well of you. Some accused Paul of being an imposter or leading people astray, and yet his life and teachings were true to the gospel of Christ.

An Appeal For Acceptance, Holiness and Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 6:11 - 7:1-12

The Christian life is one of paradoxes. There were times when people refused to acknowledge Paul, and other times when he was well known. Paul had the sentence of death upon him many times. There were constant dangers and mortal perils which almost daily confronted servants such as Paul. Regardless, God always delivers. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:9, “*Beaten, and yet not killed.*” Paul was beaten many times and yet he endured it many times. Paul was, “*Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing . . .*” (6:10). He was rejoicing because these pressures are for us, not against us (2 Corinthians 4:16ff.). Paul had a serenity from faith and hope that caused him to rejoice in the Lord always (Philippians 4:4). Being able to rejoice in the Lord is not dependent upon external circumstances. We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord always, and we are to be joyful people. The world doesn’t understand this concept, but as God’s people, we can trust Him and believe this.

Paul said that he was poor yet making many rich, had nothing and yet possessed everything. Though poor as to earthly goods, he imparted Christ to men and made them spiritually rich. He possessed a wealth that surpasses and outlasts all the treasures of earth. Paul said that he gave up all the things he once boasted in, and although he had no earthly property and prestige, he still possessed all things. What a price Paul paid to be faithful to the Lord’s ministry! Was Paul wrong in pleading for them to open wide their hearts to him with proper appreciation? No. Too many brethren even today are

prone to take for granted the sacrificial ministry of such servants, especially evangelists, missionaries and their families. Paul was not begging for praise, because it is a sin to receive glory from men (1 Corinthians 3:21). However, Paul was reminding them that his service to them had cost him dearly. He ought to have found gratitude on the part of God's people.

Open Wide Your Hearts

Paul said that extending God-like love was something that he practiced at all times. His response to these brethren who were not loving him in return is in 2 Corinthians 6:11, "*We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you.*"

2 Corinthians tells us more of Paul's in-depth feelings, longings and even anxieties and pressures than any other New Testament book.

We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also. (2 Corinthians 6:12-13).

Paul bared his soul to them. His mouth was open, and had been opened completely in the past with present results. This portrays complete, undisguised honesty. Paul said their hearts were open wide, indicating that Paul had extended himself fully in love long before the writing of this epistle and was still doing so. Paul had loved them and had spoken to them without any reservation at all. He just bared his heart and his soul to them, and he wanted them to understand that.

Notice the reason for their attitude. Their cramped feelings toward Paul were not due to him, but to the condition of the Corinthians' hearts. In 6:13 is an exhortation for a renewed look. Hopefully the Corinthians had repented of their criticism against Paul, but they were still unable to enjoy the privilege and the joy of fellowship with him by being restrained in their

own affections. Paul telling them to open wide their hearts is a command, it is in the Greek imperative mood, which means that Paul was commanding them to return his affection.

Separation from the World!

He made a very personal plea in 6:14-7:1,

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.' 'Therefore come out from them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

This is a renewed command from the apostle to flee idolatry. The actual meaning of this verse is to stop becoming unequally yoked with unbelievers. Paul is not talking about social association or fellowship with unbelievers. He has already permitted such in 1 Corinthians 5:10. He said that if an unbeliever were to invite a Christian to a feast, then he should go to his feast. Yet he also stated that if the unbeliever served meat offered to his idol or god in order to have communion and fellowship with the Christian by eating it, then the Christian could not participate. However, how can we become light to those in darkness unless we associate and eat with sinners as

Jesus did? The yoking of a saint with a sinner in religious or spiritual fellowship, in a way that the disciple is working toward the same goal or purpose as the unbeliever, is not acceptable. The Christian cannot be in partnership with wickedness or iniquity.

The Temple of God Has No Agreement with Idols

Paul continued by asking, “*Or what fellowship* (to share in common) *can light have with darkness?*” This is impossible; where light is, darkness cannot be. He asks again, “*What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?*” We get the English word “symphony” from this word “harmony.” The word “symphony” means to follow together the same score or tune, right along with one another. Paul is asking, “What fellowship and union has Christ with darkness?” The word “Belial,” which meant ruin or desperate wickedness, came to be used as a name for Satan. Paul said, “*What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?*” The word “agreement” means putting things together, voting together or standing together. What “standing together” agreement is there between the temple of God? That is the church. Paul had already identified the temple of God as being the church in 1 Corinthians 3:16- 17,

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred and you are that temple.

He has described the church in this verse saying, “What fellowship does the temple of God (or the church) have with idols and all their pollution?” One cannot vote with Satan and be in agreement with him and his opposition to God and His Word, and have fellowship with God. There can be no fellowship with God while having fellowship with idols. Paul

is adding further instructions to what he gave in 1 Corinthians 8-10, when he says in 10:14, *“Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.”* This verse is in the Greek present tense, which means that a person must make it a present and continual habit to flee idolatry. In this section, Paul is discussing the sin of the church in having fellowship with demons. He was not discussing the marriage relationship, although it is always excellent to marry one who is devoted to Christ and is a strong believer in our Lord. However, in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, Paul taught that if a Christian is married to an unbeliever, the Christian must not depart from the unbelieving spouse nor divorce because the spouse does not believe.

No Association Between Light and Darkness

In the context of 2 Corinthians 6:17 Paul commanded the Corinthians to come out from the association with the darkness: *“Therefore come out from them and be separate ...”* Paul is discussing the disciple and his relationship to idolatry. Promises are made to the Christian who comes out of this idolatry. In 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 is found the commandment to cleanse or purify from everything that contaminates body and Spirit. The pollution of idolatry that defiles the physical, moral and mental part of man must be cleansed. Paul said to keep on striving after the goal. What is the goal? The goal is holiness in the fear of God or out of reverence for God. Negative goodness is not enough; it must be positive and aggressive. The Christian cannot sin with his mind and keep his body pure (Matthew 5:21ff.). Reverence for God is a “must” attitude. Only the fear of God will restore the sense of reverence, awe and worship that is absent from many of us in the world today. Only the fear of God will purge a rebellious world of its iniquity. Psalm 78:34 says, *“Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again.”*

Paul’s Continual Plea for Acceptance (7:2-3)

In 2 Corinthians 7:2-16 Paul made a continual plea. He

already introduced this in 6:11, and then he responded to the minority in the congregation. He reminded them of the fact that the majority of the people at Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:6) had practiced discipline, and they had changed their attitude and mind for the better. The majority of the brethren were striving to do the will of the Lord and were making an effort to walk in the light. Nonetheless, there was a militant minority that had accepted these lying apostles (2 Corinthians 11) and were opposing the apostle Paul. Sometimes Paul speaks to this minority. It seems that he was making a response to them in this context,

Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds. For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has

produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. I am glad I can have complete confidence in you (2 Corinthians 7:2-16).

Paul Comforted by News From Titus (7:4-6)

In 7:2 Paul said that he and Titus had wronged no one in money, morals or doctrine. They had not taken advantage of anyone. Paul said that none of these things had been done at any time. Paul commended the majority in 7:4. His purpose in writing this epistle was to bring about a restoration of many evil things for good, and 1 Corinthians had accomplished that, 2 Corinthians 2. This teaches us that while Paul was in Troas and was waiting for Titus to come with some encouraging word about the condition in Corinth, he experienced no physical, spiritual or emotional rest. When he met Titus and heard the good news from Corinth, he was comforted. However, before he met Titus, Paul was experiencing conflicts and fears and was downcast. Being “downcast” means being laid low, humiliated or spiritually despondent. Paul had those experiences. He didn’t continue that way, but he was grieved

and hurt because of the way some of God's people were conducting themselves in the church at Corinth. When Titus told Paul that the Corinthians vehemently longed to see the apostle, that they lamented and wailed and were zealous for him, Paul rejoiced even more.

Paul Comforted by Hearing of Their Repentance

We learned that there can be no repentance without pain. Paul had, in this spirit, written severe rebukes to them in the first letter. He was sorry at first that he had to be rather harsh, but in the long run he did not regret it. Genuine love causes pain when it is necessary. It is very deceptive to think that you can love people so much that you cannot tell them the truth. It hurt Paul to confront the Corinthians with the truth, and it hurt them to hear it, but it was the beginning of their repentance and their salvation. In 7:8 Paul said that even if he caused them to sorrow by his letter, he did not regret it. At first he did regret it (the Greek imperfect tense), but later he ceased to do so. Why? Because then he rejoiced! He didn't rejoice because they were saddened, but because their sorrow led them to repentance.

The Character of True Repentance

Sorrow itself is not repentance, but the right kind of sorrow, that which is after God's way, leads to repentance. We must see our sins through the eyes of the Lord, and see what sin has done to God and to us. The meaning of repentance is a primary goal of all preaching. Even the apostles struggled in their teaching to produce repentance in folks. There is too much shallow repentance today. The word "repent" calls for a renovation of the mind, a complete change of mental outlook, life and design. Repentance has to do with the source of motives, not just conduct. It leads to the right conduct and actions. To repent means to have the very mind of Christ. A person may be sorry about the past and even reform some of the things in his life without taking captive every thought to

make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10). Repentance means to allow Christ, through His word, to take over our thinking. Our thinking must please the Lord, and we must know the meaning of repentance. Before one can enter the kingdom of Christ and let Jesus rule in his heart as Lord, his thoughts must aim at becoming the thoughts of God.

Repentance is conforming our thinking to God's revealed mind found in the Scriptures, despite how we feel about it. We have Jesus' explanation of repentance in Matthew 21:28ff. One of the sons that the father spoke to said, "I'll go and work today in the vineyard." However, he didn't do so. The son lied and did not allow the thoughts of the father to govern his life. The boy did what he wanted, and his own thinking governed his life. The other boy said to his father, "I will not go." Jesus said that afterward he regretted it and went. The second boy allowed the father, through his command, to take over his thinking. The Corinthians were greedy according to the way of God. Thus, repentance involves more than merely being sorry for sin, but being sorry produces repentance and action. This is the right kind of sorrow. This is grief according to God's way; it works repentance which brings no regret. Since repentance conforms to the revealed mind of God and brings about reconciliation, forgiveness, peace and joy, it starts with godly grief and results in joyful salvation.

The Nature of Worldly Sorrow

Worldly sorrow produces death because it becomes a substitute for true repentance or changing of the mind. The story of Judas illustrates this point in Matthew 27:3-6. Judas had worldly sorrow. He had sorrow over the fact the Lord was about to die, and it was sorrow over worldly things and considerations. Perhaps he even regretted the consequences of what he had done. However, he wasn't willing to think about certain truths and things as God thinks about them. Worldly sorrow on his part produced death, and he took his own life. Worldly sorrow, which produces death, wants to make things

right on the basis of emotion and not on the basis of renewed thinking or mentality. Worldly sorrow regrets being caught in wrong or sin and having to suffer the effects. One is not willing to change because of it, and perhaps thinks that he will be more careful in the future to not be caught again. This is seen in the mind of criminals and even some church members who do not understand what godly sorrow is. They do not understand that sorrow works repentance toward salvation. Worldly grief usually contains anger and self-pity, but it still leads to death.

The Evidence of Their Godly Sorrow

We make repentance happen through the exercise of the human will as it conforms our thinking and will to the will of Christ. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7:11 that their proper thinking caused them to have earnestness, diligence and carefulness. They did not act superficially but with diligent deliberation. They reacted with eagerness to clear themselves. Godly sorrow had worked in them with eagerness to get rid of all the sins and barriers between themselves and God and between themselves and the apostle Paul. Their sorrow toward God produced in them indignation, vexation, anger and much grief. They were indignant toward themselves, and along with this attitude their sorrow worked in them alarm or fear, godly fear. This is the beginning of thinking God's way. Next Paul said, "*. . . what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.*" The action of the church is described. The visible evidence of their change of mind is seen in their starting to be given to grief and sorrow and turning the wicked man over to the devil (1 Corinthians 5). Earlier, Paul said that they were puffed up, or proud (1 Corinthians 5:2). Now they have conformed their thinking and doing God's will. What the church of Christ needs more than anything else today is proper repentance. It is a command from which we do not graduate.

The Grace of Giving (1)

2 Corinthians 8:1-24

The final commission and command the Lord gave the church was repentance (Revelation 2-3). As long as the body is indwelt, one is to live a penitent life, to practice repentance. The teaching of the word of God will remind one that he must become Christian in his ideals, desires and aspirations before he can become a Christian in practice. In 2 Corinthians 7:15 Titus was moved with deep, innermost affections by his experience with the church in Corinth. What impressed Titus of the church was their obedience, hearing and obeying, and the fear and trembling with which they received him. Titus saw godly sorrow, obedience, and fear and trembling in the Corinthians. The imperativeness of the fear of God and the perfection of holiness out of reverence for God is evident through this.

2 Corinthians 8-9 deal with grace giving and how to overcome the problem of stewardship. Everything one has belongs to the Lord. One must determine what his ability is in the matter of giving material substance back to the Lord.

Grace Giving as Promised

Paul had given an apostolic order to the church about the matter of giving upon the first day of the week in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. In 2 Corinthians 8 he discussed the nature of the Macedonian brethren, and urged the Corinthians to imitate them. Then in 2 Corinthians 9:5, he admonished the Corinthians to fulfill or finish what they had previously promised. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 says,

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Giving Regardless of Circumstance

The Macedonian response and the basis of their giving was from the grace of God given in them, and God's grace is given in you whenever you give today. You give the grace of God, by the grace of God, and His grace is at work in your life. We are stewards of God's grace.

The low spiritual level of the church at Corinth had affected their giving. When a church is not spiritual, it cannot be generous and biblical in its giving. There are a number of ways that tell you that you are practicing grace giving, and that concept is the aim of the study of chapter 8. One way to tell that one is practicing giving. That he gives regardless of his circumstances. In 8:1-2 Paul said the Macedonians gave out of the most severe trial, and this denotes crushing pressure or being squeezed. Under all of these trials of afflictions and persecutions, the Macedonians found enough of God's grace available for them to overflow or abound in rich generosity. The word "liberality or generosity" means giving unconditionally, sincerely, honestly or single-mindedly. They concealed nothing, and they held back nothing.

Added to the emotional and physical pressure of persecution was the pressure of being in extreme poverty. The word "extreme," or "deep" means deep, down poverty. The word "poverty" is also used to describe the state of Jesus (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our Lord, though rich, became poor and

poverty stricken for our sake by coming to this earth as a human being and in taking our sins on the cross. Our Lord divested Himself of His heavenly glory in coming to this earth. That is the poverty that characterized our Lord and the Macedonians. The Macedonians were destitute and impoverished financially. They were in a worse financial condition than the poor among the Judean saints whom they were helping. Paul described the poor among the saints in Judea in Romans 15.

Enthusiastic Grace Giving

Notice the attitude on the part of these great brethren. The pressure and deep poverty overflowed in their liberality along with joy. The basic problem with the church today and their financial involvement with the Lord's work is in the area of attitudes or motives. Grace giving is giving in spite of one's circumstances. Whenever there is a surrender and commitment to the will of God, there is grace giving. Grace giving is giving enthusiastically (8:3-4). The Macedonian's giving was voluntary and spontaneous. It was of grace, not of pressure of man. What does it mean to give beyond one's ability? Perhaps the answer is seen from the example of the poor widow (Mark 12:41ff.; Luke 21). The poor widow gave out of her poverty. She put in everything that she had, her whole livelihood. In God's eyes she gave more than all the others who gave on that occasion, because she gave up her livelihood. That is exceptional and praiseworthy, and is beyond what the Lord requires. Are you constantly prepared, if necessary, to give up everything that you have to Jesus, including your life?

The Privilege of Giving

The Macedonians begged to give and requested the favor of being part of this contribution. They were asking for a favor, to give for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. Perhaps we would participate in grace giving if we realized that we were sharing in the service of Christ through these full time

servants and others who receive and administer such gifts. Their giving even surprised Paul. Paul understood their extreme financial condition, that they were in deep poverty. Gathered from the context, Paul said the Gentile brethren were showing their esteem and love to God for what these Jewish brethren have done in taking the gospel of Christ to them (Romans 15). The Gentiles were debtors to the Jews who had shared with them the gospel of Christ, and now they ought to send to them. When the Macedonians heard about it, they said, "We want to have a part in it." It is rare today to hear of brethren with this attitude and disposition of heart, begging for an opportunity to participate in some work of the Lord.

Giving Up Self to Christ

There is an important truth in 8:5 when Paul said, "*And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.*" There was no selfishness or covetousness among the Macedonians. They had given up self to Christ. They were not their own as Paul had reminded them in 1 Corinthians 6:19. They were sold out to their Lord. They had been bought with a price, and so they sold out to Him. In Galatians 2:20, great grace was upon the saints, not only in Galatia but in every church. Luke describes the great grace that was upon the saints in Jerusalem as being of one heart, one soul and one mind (Acts 4:32). They distributed to everyone who was in need, and that was an expression of God's great grace. However, God did not force this kind of giving. Paul said, in this context, that because they gave themselves to the Lord and to Paul by the will of God, they chose the will of God instead of their own. Grace giving also completes our purpose as seen in 2 Corinthians 8:6-9. Paul said,

So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in

everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Purpose to Give

In 2 Corinthians 9 grace giving begins with a purpose. You purpose in your heart that you are going to give a certain amount to the Lord, and that is where Scriptural giving begins—in the purpose of your heart. The goal of giving in such a Christ-like way is to cultivate the character or disposition of grace in the giver. Paul said in 8:6, “*So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.*”

A Christ-like Character

There is great emphasis upon God’s grace in us which would cause such giving. This grace of God in the Macedonian churches produces Christ-like character. This concept is the very essence and nature of Christianity.

Paul said in 8:7, “*—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*” Paul had said earlier that they were lacking in no spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 1:4-7). They had even boasted about their spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. However, Paul then told them that they were not to excel just in the possession of certain gifts, but to excel in the grace of giving. Grace giving is giving as Jesus gave (8:8-9). The Corinthians had promised to send financial help to their Judean brethren, so Paul wanted them to compare their own earnestness to that of the Macedonians. He was putting their love to the test. They needed to prove their credibility although Paul had told them

to give in 1 Corinthians 16. Paul did not want to regulate the amount for them to give. The law of Moses did that, and there are definite examples and guidance in God's word to show how to express love to God in the matter of giving. There are commands throughout the New Testament, and through them God defines love. The Christian cannot love the Lord outside of his commandments. Paul is not saying in this passage that giving is not commanded, but he is saying that we have the supreme example of the grace of giving: Jesus.

In Philippians 2 the Lord laid aside His privileges of being divine and being served as God in heaven, and came to this earth as a slave and as a servant. In Colossians 1:15-16, Jesus was rich in His person, for He is the eternal God. He is rich in His possessions and position. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Ephesians 1:20 and 23 illustrate what position the Lord assumed when He went back to heaven in a glorified body. In His power, the Son of God divested Himself of all the glory He received in heaven as Deity and came to earth and impoverished Himself. He assumed the incarnate or bodily state with all that was involved, namely, the cross and the resurrection (Philippians 2:5ff.). This perfect example should motivate us today. Jesus borrowed many things while He was here upon the earth, even a tomb in which to be laid. He owned all, yet laid aside his privileges to fulfill the will of God on our behalf. In Hebrews 12 is seen how the Lord endured all the affliction, shame and humiliation of the cross with joy because He could see the salvation that His sacrifice would bring about. He was rich, yet for man's sake, He became poor, that man, through His poverty, might become rich. Therefore, grace giving is giving the way Jesus gave.

Completed Giving

Grace giving willingly honors our pledge or our purpose. 2 Corinthians 8:10-11 says,

And here is my advice about what is best for you in

this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

The difference between promise and performance is known. Corinth had boasted earlier of their willingness to promise, their willingness to give. To complete means to bring to a desired goal, or to finish the work. Paul told them to do it “now.” In Revelation 3:1-2, our Lord rebuked His church at Sardis because He had not found any work of theirs completed. They had a reputation for being alive, but they were dead. Paul told the Corinthians to match their words with grace giving. Grace giving includes faith and ability.

2 Corinthians 8:12-17 says,

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.’ I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.

Giving in Accordance

Paul said to give according to what one has. This is acceptable or very favorable. There is acceptance on the part of God to our Lord. There are a few and exceptional cases of people who gave all that they had. Jesus asked the rich young

ruler on one occasion to give all that he had, and that was necessary in order to break the hold of covetousness upon the young man. However, there are exceptions in looking at the Macedonians and at the rich young ruler. The general rule is to give proportionate to ability, relative to one's means. Although the word of God teaches the matter of stewardship of all that we are and all we possess, it does not legislate specific proportions. Each Christian, regardless of his income, can so give. Everyone is to give something. The equality has to do with Corinth in comparison to Macedonia. The equality is giving according to one's means. Macedonia had given beyond their means and their ability, and so the brethren at Corinth should give out of their means and ability so that there might be equality. The equality is each one giving according to his means. Each gives abundantly and according to the prosperity which the Lord has granted him, then the grace of God is dispensed by the Christian.

2 Corinthians 8:15 is a quotation from Exodus 16:18 which describes the Israelites, who at that particular time would go out and gather the daily portion of the manna which God was providing for them. Some gathered more than a day's portion, and others did not gather enough. However, when each one measured his gathering, it weighed the same. God brought about or forced equality, not just in the amount but in participation. Grace giving involves carefulness in the collection and the administration of that which has been set aside and given by God's people. That demands an open and honest effort on the part of God's servants.

Accountability

2 Corinthians 8:18-24 says,

And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. 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. We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men. In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers (unnamed), they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

Notice the open and honest nature of these faithful servants. Paul said the money would be administered by more than one person. The two unnamed brothers were appointed or elected by the churches, and thus were referred to as apostles, one sent forth under a commission of the churches. In Philippians 2 Paul spoke of one of the servants at Philippi who was sent to Rome to minister to him as being an apostle of the church. In Acts 13 and 14 Paul and Barnabas were sent out to the church at Antioch, and they were referred to as apostles of the church at Antioch. Paul spoke in these verses of 2 Corinthians of great accountability. He said that they wanted to guard against criticism of their handling of this generous gift, for their aims were entirely honorable in both the eyes of the Lord and men. This kind of administration is a glory to Christ. In giving there must be given an honest, open and complete report of the gifts and their administration. In the last verses Paul told them to give in a way that expressed their love for Christ.

The Grace of Giving (2)

2 Corinthians 9:1–10:5

Grace giving is the one undeniable way to prove one's love, and the principles of this grace giving are found in 2 Corinthians 9. Paul said in 9:1-5,

There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

There was once a little boy who had been given some money by his parents to give to the Lord. As the collection basket was passed their way, the young boy had his money ready and was anxious to give it, but he noticed the fellow next to him was making absolutely no preparation to give. The young fellow just couldn't figure that out. Finally, before the collection basket got there, the boy handed his quarter to this

man and said, “Here, you give my quarter, and I will climb under the pew.” Much can be learned from the sensitive attitude of the young boy. We ought to think very seriously about what the Scriptures teach concerning our stewardship in the matter of giving.

Giving Will Provoke Others

Paul had spoken with pride to the Macedonians about Corinth’s eagerness and willingness to give. The Corinthian’s zeal fired up and excited the Macedonians. It is biblical to praise one church to another as a motivating factor, because when this is done God receives honor and glory. There is a need of proper motivation in the matter of giving. It is interesting that Paul would warn of false teachers as he did on occasions, but he never consistently criticized one church to another. Paul said in this context (8:22-24) that his purpose in sending the three servants was to insure that what he had said about Corinth would not prove to be an empty boast. Paul wanted to uphold his own reputation and the reputation of the Lord. He mentioned that it would be a disgrace if some of the brethren from Macedonia were to come with him and find the brethren at Corinth unprepared. Paul said, “. . . *but that you may be ready, as I said you would be.*” The words “be ready” are in the Greek perfect passive participle tense, which meant that the Corinthians were to be prepared in advance to Paul’s coming, as they were giving contribution on each Lord’s Day. In this way, they would be ready to give when Paul and his co-workers came.

Giving Will Bless You

He wanted their contribution to be made happily, not grudgingly or as an extortion. Paul didn’t want them to covet for themselves what they were giving. They must not be coerced to give. One must not be covetous of that which he has purposed and planned to give and is giving. Paul said that would be wrong, and God would not be glorified in that kind

of giving because it would no longer be grace giving. Notice the principles of grace giving in 9:6-15,

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Sowing and Reaping

In 9:6 Paul was referring to the law of nature—sowing and reaping. He who is sparse or thrifty in sowing is sparse in reaping. The farmer has to give up control of his seed and its use, and he has to throw it into the ground. That is not what is done now, but seed used to be broadcasted that way. They

would plant it into the ground where the seed would rot and appear to be lost, but it was not lost. It was not a lost effort; it was not gone. When the seed fulfilled its purpose, the farmer received it back again, and much more as well. If one sows generously in a way that is praising, benevolent and liberal then he will reap generously. The rewards that God promises in this verse are not just material rewards, but they are real, spiritual rewards which can be ours through giving. One of these rewards is the wealth of a Christ-like personality that is being developed. The man who is generous in giving to the Lord and to others will be loved, honored, respected, and maybe even sought after for advice. He will be helped when he is in need, and he will be free of the shriveling vices of envy, covetousness, anxiety and loneliness.

Purposeful Giving

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul said each person should give as he has decided for himself. Paul motivated the brethren to give, but did not decide for each saint how much he was to give. Each one was to give as he had purposed. Once again, this verse is in the perfect tense which denotes a completed action in the past, but which continues to have present results. Scriptural giving begins with this kind of purpose. There is a right purpose and attitude involved in everything we do, such as dropping the offering into the collection basket or sending it to someone. There is the completion of what we have already purposed and decided in our hearts to do. We must prayerfully decide what percent of our income we are going to give to the Lord's work and His church. We have already made up our minds in our heart to give, and not to wait until the time that a collection is taken. We've already purposed, and we've already planned. We've already intended by God's grace to give a certain amount.

Joyful Giving

Paul said our giving must not be reluctantly or under

compulsion (9:7). Our giving must not be out of constraint or distress. Any kind of emotional arm-twisting or manipulation brings nothing but spiritual harm to the giver. Being pressured, coerced or intimidated is not biblical, and should never enter into the practice of Christianity. It accomplishes great harm and does not bring glory and honor to the Lord. We are not to give in a reluctant way; coerced methods do not work. Giving must come from the heart, and we must not be mad or sad givers, but glad ones. God can bless a gift that is given out of a sense of duty, but God cannot add His blessing to the giver unless his heart is right. We want God to bless us as givers and the gift as well. Finally, “. . . *for God loves a cheerful giver.*” The Greek word for cheerful is *hilaron*, and this is the word from which we get “hilarity” or “hilarious.” The way some of us give may be rather ridiculous, but we should be hilarious with joy over the privilege of giving, since that is the way the Lord gives. In the Old Testament this word “cheerful” translates into a Hebrew word which means “caused to shine.” A hilarity of joy on the part of the giver causes the soul and the spirit of that person to shine with the image of God. Are we smiling or frowning when the collection plate is passed? When we give generously, we give much of ourselves because we receive money in exchange for our mental and physical efforts.

Made Able to Give

Notice 2 Corinthians 8:5: “*And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.*” They had so given in Macedonia because they had first of all given themselves to the Lord. God’s power is available in the matter of giving. God is able now, and He keeps on being able. We must learn to trust in the willingness and the ability of God to supply our needs and to supply us with the ability to give. Every Christian has been given enough of everything that he may accomplish what God has for him to do. Grace abounds to us, and all we possess is by God’s grace and for service to Him. He gives us the

necessary grace of each day for His glory. God provides for his servants absolutely and sufficiently, and we must learn to be content with it. Far too many disciples are deceived into thinking that they do not have enough to give. Whatever we have is enough for us to give that which is pleasing to the Lord.

In 2 Corinthians 8-9 is seen that the willing, purposeful and cheerful givers will always have enough to give. Do you suppose that we have insisted on too much for self? The word “abound” means “to overflow,” “more than enough,” or “super-abundance.” God is able to give grace that is more than enough for every good work. This does not mean that we are to give only of our overflow. The Macedonians didn’t have enough overflow to give from, and yet they gave. Paul is saying that the seed which is cast into the ground (9:10ff) is the concept that must be understood in the matter of giving. If one hoards the seed, it does not increase at all. However, God will keep on supplying seed to sow. He will multiply it and swell the harvest of your benevolence, and you will always be rich enough to be generous.

2 Corinthians 9:9 is taken from Psalm 112:9, and the subject is the man who fears God. The man who fears God is one who has confidence or trust in God’s purpose for giving. Giving is very helpful and necessary. The word “supply” means “to intensify or to pile upon,” and the God who does this repeatedly in the farmer’s field will also do it in a believer’s checkbook or purse. Material things are merely means to a spiritual end, because God’s goal in us is righteousness or perfection in the image of His Son. 2 Corinthians 9:11 teaches that the primary goal of Christian giving is thanksgiving to God. When our giving is grace giving, the glory goes to God.

Paul talks about their profession and confession of the gospel in 2 Corinthians 9:12-15. This is the description of the contribution that the brethren made, and Paul said that it did more and would do more than just provide for the needs of God’s people. More than that, it was to overflow in a flood of thanksgiving to God. In this section Paul said that their

generous giving would result in three things: It would enrich the giver, supply the needs of God's people in Judea (9:12), and produce thanksgiving to God on both the part of the Corinthians and the Judeans (9:11-12). This longing and praying for one another was on account of the unspeakable, inexpressible or unutterable grace of God in one another. Such giving shows that God's people appreciated Christ and His redeeming work, and so they excelled in their giving. Paul started this section referring to God's grace (8:1), and ends this section appealing to God's grace (9: 14-15).

Human language seems bankrupt in giving full expression to infinite grace, absolute goodness and undeserved favor. One said the best word to describe it is "Jesus." John 1:14 says, *"We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* He was inexpressible grace incarnated.

A Challenge to the Rebels of the Church

In 2 Corinthians 10-13 Paul reproved as well as appealed to the minority in the church at Corinth. The majority of the brethren had disciplined the immoral man, and Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:6 that the punishment inflicted by the majority was sufficient. In 2 Corinthians 7, the majority of the brethren had caused Paul inexpressible joy and comfort. However, the Judaizing minority and their followers were opposing Paul, therefore Paul had to respond to these false teachers. He referred to the lying apostles and to the improper attitude that the brethren had toward these false teachers in chapter 11.

A Christlike Attitude

Attitudes are very important. We must be Christ-like, not only in our doctrinal conviction (our belief in upholding the truth seen in this context), but we must also have the spirit and mind of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 10:1-2 Paul said,

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to

you—I, Paul, who am ‘timid’ when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.

Some were saying that Paul was very courageous when he wrote letters such as 1 Corinthians. He wrote these letters, however, from a distance, but he was very timid and even weak in bodily presence (2 Corinthians 10:10). The false teachers were very overbearing in their attitude, and some in the church, the minority, loved that kind of attitude. They thought that it was right and proper. In 2 Corinthians 11:20 Paul said, *“In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face.”* If a person is converted and brought up in an atmosphere of humility and love, they learn to depend upon the Lord. However, if they are brought up in an atmosphere that is dictatorial in its leadership in the church, they grow up depending upon man’s strength and leadership. Paul appealed to them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and they failed to realize that true spiritual power is in such traits. Paul said that if he was viewed as a weakling, then so was Jesus for those are His traits. Nevertheless, our Lord could be very stern and even angry if it were necessary. Paul was pleading with them not to force him to come and prove to them how bold he could be.

Accusations Against Paul

The false teachers were accusing Paul of being inconsistent in his method of work. He responded to his critics in chapters 10:3 through 12. Paul responded, making a refutation of the false teachers and their accusations against him in 10:3-7,

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war

as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he.

They accused Paul of having low motives such as the motivation of money in his work for the Lord. They said Paul was using the same kind of methods that the worldly teachers and philosophers were using. Therefore, he could not be commissioned by the Lord. Paul admits that he was abiding or walking in the flesh, but he does not war as leading an army according to the flesh. In 10:3 Paul said he fights Satan, not men. His weapons are not carnal or human, such as craftiness and deceit. From the context, one can be in the flesh as long as he lives in the body, but not resort to underhanded methods such as lying, misrepresentation and such reviling things. The using of human methods to defeat satanic forces is doomed to failure. We cannot fight spiritual conflicts with carnal weapons and win.

Building Up the Church

Paul used some sarcasm, as it was used on occasion in the Old Testament, which enabled him to rebuke error and direct their mind to what was right. Sarcasm can be spiritual if the motives are right in using it. Paul's preference for building up the church involves the meekness and gentleness of Christ (10:1). The sharp words of these chapters are directed to the false teachers and those who had been misled by them. Paul said that we are to sharply, severely and harshly rebuke false

teachers (Titus 1:15). However, it would be wrong to take a weak brother in the Lord and deal with him harshly and severely. Those who are encountered with his sin should go to him in the spirit of meekness and gentleness, restoring him, yet constantly looking to themselves lest they be tempted (Galatians 6). The New Testament deals with false teachers differently than with any other group of people in the church.

Spiritual Warfare

Paul said that the Christian's warfare and strategy were not on the level of the world but spiritual. Saints can be tempted to use or practice worldly methods of domineering or lording over others to succeed. Some disciples are deceived into thinking that public servants are to be church bosses, ruling with autocratic spirits like the Judaizers were in Corinth. They were trying to impress the people with all of their qualifications, positions and commendations from one another. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:24 that he refused to lord over anyone's faith. That did not mean that he was not a genuine apostle and that he could, if necessary, speak with great boldness. The Lord's church is not in a war to conquer land, territory or amass worldly possessions but to capture people's minds, hearts and spirits. Ours is a conflict of light over darkness, truth over error. Our methods are spiritual, mental, rational and persuasive. The church had to see that Paul was adequately armed by the Lord in his work using the thoughts and the knowledge of God. In Ephesians 6:10-18 Paul described what it means to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

The Question of Authority and Paul's Holy Jealousy

2 Corinthians 10:6 - 11:15

Ephesians 6:10 speaks of the weapons used in spiritual warfare, and it coincides well with 2 Corinthians 10. Paul said in Ephesians 6:10, “*Brethren, be strong in the Lord!*” Strength is in the Lord, and in the power of His might. He talks about our struggles in Ephesians 6:12-13,

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full (or complete) armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Spiritual Armor

Notice what this armor consists of: We must have the belt of truth buckled around our waist with the breastplate of righteousness in place—truth and then righteousness (6:14). Our feet must be fitted with the gospel of peace. We must have the gospel of Jesus, the gospel of peace. In addition to this we take up the shield of faith. Faith is one of the weapons used in warfare. By faith, all the flaming arrows or darts of the evil one can be extinguished. Then we must put on the helmet of salvation. We need the assurance and confidence of salvation in Christ to protect our head. Next is the active weapon—the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Then in 6:18 is the

weapon of prayer. These are all spiritual weapons that we use in our conflict. Paul is talking about these in 2 Corinthians 10.

The Power of God's Word

When Jesus resisted the devil (Matthew 4:1-11), He fought with His spirit and mind focused on the Word of God. Jesus did not use worldly schemes like psychology or human wisdom against Satan. He needed only the knowledge and faith (or trust) in the revealed Word of God. God's Word has the power and ability to tear down or demolish strongholds, sophistries and all that rears its proud head against the knowledge of God. There can be no argument nor position that can stand up to God's Word, no matter who presents the arguments.

His Word is able to compel every human thought to surrender in obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5-6). Every human thought is to be taken captive to the mind of Christ. In the early church the gospel conquered Jewish legalism (Acts 2-8). In Acts 11ff, the gospel began to conquer all that the Gentile pagan world believed and practiced. The gospel captured the thoughts of so many, delivered them from the domain of darkness, and brought them into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Colossians 1:13. The Word of God captured the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10). It captured men and women of great standing in Berea and Thessalonica—those who responded to the good news of our Lord, the Word of the cross (Acts 17). It also captured a host of others. To this very day the Word continues to overthrow the proud arguments of the world and every pretension that sets and raises itself against the knowledge of God. There is not any philosophy of man, regardless of its source, that is exalted against God that cannot and should not be demolished, captured and brought under obedience to the central and redemptive purposes of God. Hebrews 4:12-13 speaks of the power and purpose of God's Word.

A Christian's Warfare

Paul said our warfare is not against people but against the thoughts and ideas that stand in opposition to people's opportunity to know our Lord Jesus Christ. These spiritual weapons are for all of us, each disciple—for each parent, for each teenager, for each teacher—whoever the disciple is. Why should we be so timid and fainthearted in our approach to the world today? We must have the meekness and gentleness of Christ but also His boldness, upholding the word of God. We must not resign to a defensive position; we must take an offensive one. We must live and speak up for the Master. The world uses tactics of pressure to get their ideas across, but by our lives and sincere teaching we must create such a moral atmosphere in each community, that we will be enabled to stand against unrighteousness. Paul said that he was ready to punish every act of disobedience once their obedience was complete (2 Corinthians 10:6). He said to look facts in the face, and 10:7 says, *"If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he."*

Paul's Response to His Detractors

In 10:8-10 Paul continues to respond to the militant minority,

For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it. I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. For some say, 'His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.'

Paul began to cite visible credentials from his former ministry among them. He had spent eighteen months at Corinth preaching and teaching Christ among them (Acts 18). They had

seen his life and had been influenced by his teaching of the gospel of Christ. They had become servants of the Lord because of such preaching.

To Those Who Judge on Outward Appearance

Paul then dealt with the question of authority in 2 Corinthians 10:11-18,

Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field (or sphere) God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you (you Corinthians). We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory. But, 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.' For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Paul said that he had spoken with apostolic authority to build them up and mature them in the Lord, not to frighten them. The authority of a preacher is never that of the preacher, but it is the authority of the Word of God. All authority belongs to Christ Jesus. The Lord's affirmation of that truth is recorded

in Matthew 28:18. Paul refers to this in Ephesians 4:15 by saying that we are to speak the truth in love. In this context, Paul would not dare class or compare himself with any of those who put forward their own claims, those who played the game of self-comparison. Competition or comparing oneself one with another is very deceiving, hurtful, and even spiritually destructive. It is a bad practice to use another; it is proper practice to follow a good example. That is very helpful, but comparing self with others to commend oneself is like the Pharisee about whom the Lord spoke in Luke 18. He told the parable of the publican and the Pharisee, in which the Pharisee compared himself to a sinful, evil tax gatherer. We are not to compare ourselves with others. We are to look to the Lord and see how short we fall of His glory.

Paul stated that he had every right to instruct and warn the Corinthians, because he was the first to come to them with the gospel. This was Paul's proper limit or territory. He had served eighteen months where God had assigned him. Yet where were these false teachers and lying apostles when the gospel was first being preached in Corinth? Paul's aim was to preach Christ where he had never been named. He made this statement in Romans 15:20, and that concept is presented here.

To Those Who Boast of Their Accomplishments

Some at Corinth were so foolish that they set themselves up as standards of measurement. When they gauged themselves by that standard, behold, they were perfect! Paul's boasting would be according to the proper sphere which God bestowed. Paul was not boasting about other men's labors, 2 Corinthians 10:15. He said, *"Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand . . ."* In 10:16 Paul said that when that happened they could carry the gospel to lands that lied beyond Corinth. Paul's goal was Spain, the outermost rim of the Roman empire. Paul was not looking for a ready-made place to preach the Lord Jesus Christ. A very important point is learned from this

statement.

The Lord Enables Paul to Build Up the Church

Paul knew the work of building up the church required certain things. Ephesians 4:11-16 gives the divine job description of the function and work of each church. He knew that building up the church would involve and require spiritual healing and restoration in the Lord's body at Corinth before he could go on to other fields of labor for Jesus. His ministry was not limited to initial conversion and enlarging the number of people being baptized into Christ, while disregarding and neglecting the healing and maturing of the body. Paul knew of the urgency of world evangelism, but he had the balance in his work that included evangelizing, teaching, defending the faith and edifying. He was responsible for the care of all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28). Paul is a great example of doing cross-cultural missionary work, converting, equipping, training and all the work that had to be done to make mature disciples in Jesus.

In Ephesians 4:11ff. Paul executed the Lord's will in the church. He said that he was willing to have his life and ministry examined and approved by the Lord, not by the man who recommends himself. A person who sings his own praises always gets the pitch too high, but as to the man whom the Lord commends, he alone is to be accepted. In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul continued his earnest plea to the minority.

Paul's Godly Jealousy for the Spiritual Welfare of These Brethren

2 Corinthians 11:1-4 says,

I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived

by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

Paul Resorts to Folly

Paul was somewhat embarrassed over being forced by the Judaizers to continue to uphold his apostolic authority and to defend his integrity of character. He said, "I wish you would bear with me a little in my folly." He felt that self-commendation was folly, and was a role forced upon him by the methods of the false teachers. In this chapter Paul shared the perils of his ministry to prove his point. He went down to their level of reasoning because it was permitted. It was not the most expedient and helpful way to reason, but since it was necessary he involved himself in their kind of reasoning and did what Solomon said to do in Proverbs 26:5. The wise man of old said, "*Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.*" That passage is helpful in view of the context of 2 Corinthians 11. Paul, in the spirit of humility, stated what he did because he knew that the spiritual condition of the church and the dignity and honor of the Lord and His church was at stake. The apostle Paul was willing to be led by the Spirit of the Lord to do whatever was right and necessary, though disagreeable to himself. He wanted to rescue these brethren from the deceit of these false apostles.

Godly Jealousy

Paul said that he had a divine or godly jealousy for them. This is the kind of jealousy that God feels for His people when they give their love, devotion and service to other gods. This kind of jealousy that God has for His people is seen in Exodus 20:5. Paul said, "*I am jealous for you . . .*" This word means

“to boil over.” It is zeal in a good sense—boiling over with god-like jealousy. As their spiritual father, Paul's jealousy was on behalf of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 4:15 he had begotten them in the gospel, and he was their father in the gospel. Paul said, “I have betrothed or espoused (it is the aorist middle voice in the Greek) the Corinthian saints. I have betrothed you to one husband, Christ, not to me (Paul), Cephas or Apollos, but to Jesus alone.” One must understand the Jewish custom of marriage to understand these passages of scripture.

Jewish Custom of Marriage

The Jewish culture was for a couple to come together like Joseph and Mary had come together. This practice is seen in Matthew 1:18ff. When two came together for the betrothal, or if one became the espoused wife of a man as Mary had, they made a covenant witnessed by God. It was a solemn agreement between the man and the women at which point the Lord joined them together in the marriage union. They pledged their willingness to be husband and wife. They did as the Lord said in that there was a leaving of the father and mother and a cleaving to each other. They made a commitment witnessed by God, and God at that point joined them together. Malachi 2:11ff. speaks of marriage as being a covenant. This was not like engagement in our nation today where a couple promises to make a covenant to become married. In this text (2 Corinthians 11:2), Paul had “betrothed,” and the word “betroth” means “harmony.” It means “to join, unite, or fit together.” He had joined them and fitted them together as the pure bride of Christ. Paul had not engaged them, as in our culture, but he had married them to Christ. This action could not be accomplished by the Law of Moses but only by the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 4:15). The Jewish custom was this: After they were united in the marriage covenant, there was the interval period which could last for any period of time, even a year. Then the couple came together, enjoyed the marriage feast and began to live together as husband and wife.

Paul said, "I espoused you to Christ, your one husband, and although we are waiting to actually be together with our Lord, I want to present you as a chaste or pure virgin to Christ, the true and only husband." There could be no better relationship to Christ than that of being His true bride.

Satan is Cunning

However, Paul expressed his fear. He said that he was afraid that the spirit of the devil had seduced them just as the serpent had deceived Eve long ago. The devil is very cunning. The word "cunning" denotes adroitness, expertise, artfulness or caginess. Satan attacked Eve in the mind and in her thoughts, which compares to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10 in that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual in dealing with Satan's onslaught. We are to take the Word of God and overthrow arguments and proud obstacles that are against the knowledge of God. Satan led Eve's thoughts astray, and similarly he was leading or corrupting the Corinthians' thoughts away from single-hearted devotion to Christ. The devil was doing his destructive work through his servants who were masquerading as apostles of Christ.

The False Apostles

What Paul means as he discusses false apostles is seen in 2 Corinthians 11:5-15,

But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super-apostles.' I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have

kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

It is not surprising that these ministers of Satan would masquerade themselves as ministers of righteousness, because Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. The deceit of the mind is commonly laid down as the principle of all sin, and our faith keeps us from being deceived by the evil one. This faith is a genuine trust and confidence, an assured conviction and confidence in the word of God and our belief in the faithfulness or the trustworthiness of the Word of God. The battle is won in the mind, and that is what Paul was trying to tell the brethren in Corinth. Their minds had been corrupted from the single hearted devotion and purity that are toward Christ.

The story of Eve is the initial temptation that is referred to here. She thought that she would *not* die spiritually if she ate of the fruit. She thought she could really be like God, as Satan told her that she would be like Jehovah. She was deceived, and she suffered the consequences of her deceit.

Daily Renewing of the Mind

Is there a necessity of daily renewing of the mind? Romans 12:1-2 says, "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this*

world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . .” This was so that faith and devotion to Christ could be sustained and self-controlled. One of the elements of the fruit of the spirit is mind or thought control (Galatians 5:22). Satan doesn’t attack only our bodies, but also our minds. He plants cleverly devised, twisted thoughts in our minds by words, pictures or actions. Satan lied to Eve in his promise of immediate and pleasurable experiences, and by telling her that what God said was just too simple. He told her, “Don’t pay attention. Surely you don’t believe what God has said? Surely you don’t believe that you will die?” This accusation is being made in our generation: “The teaching of Scripture is too simplistic, and life now is too complicated and sophisticated.” “Simplicity” is the big word, used over and over again, in living according to God’s Word. Therefore, the Judaizers were saying, that one couldn’t have freedom in Christ or the spiritual blessings that Paul said they could have in the Lord (Ephesians 1:3). The Judaizers believed one must take on the yoke, the regimented strict diet laws and the observance of certain feast days of the law of Moses. They believed one had to do all of that to live holy and survive the complexities and pressures of this present life. Notice the choice satire and sarcasm that Paul used in this context. The Judaizers would say that they believed in Jesus, but that He came to confirm and keep in observance the Law of Moses. They denied the role Jesus came to fulfill, and they denied the all-sufficiency of the cross.

A Different Gospel

In Acts 15 the apostles, the brethren from Antioch, and the elders got together and discussed the all-sufficiency of the cross. That was what needed to be established in the minds of the Corinthians—the all-sufficiency of the Word of the cross. This message that they were hearing from these false teachers wasn’t a gospel; it was another Jesus and a different gospel. The false teachers brought the spirit of the devil. If Satan can capture a person’s mind and thoughts, he doesn’t have to

possess the person's body. There is only the gospel of Jesus Christ; there is no other gospel (Galatians 1:6, 9). What the Judaizers taught was not good news, but bad news. They taught justification by law which was death (2 Corinthians 3). Some at Corinth were readily enduring the foolishness of these false teachers.

Paul's Apostleship Upheld

The false teachers accused Paul of being unskilled in speech, but Paul said that he did have knowledge. At all times he had made known the full truth to the Corinthians. He didn't know if these lying apostles called themselves "super-duper" apostles, or if the brethren at Corinth that had been seen by them called them so. Perhaps both groups referred to them in that way. Paul acknowledged that he was not a skilled or trained speaker, but he was able to present the knowledge as it is in Christ.

Paul's Apostolic Authority, Visions, and Thorns

2 Corinthians 11:16–12:10

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:6 that he might be regarded as “unskilled.” Some versions use the word “rude,” which originally comes from the Greek word *idiotes*. This word was used to describe a private individual who took no part in public life, and who had no technical training. Paul acknowledged that he was not a eloquent-speaking, trained orator. The gospel is God’s good news about our Savior, not oratory or myth. The gospel is history. Paul was not without technical knowledge of saving power and grace. He had taught and spoken the truth, that those who were now criticizing Paul had previously been saved from sin through his message. Preachers do not need eloquence, but they must have the knowledge of the truth of the gospel. People who ask questions about the soul do not want entertainment or oratorical showmanship. They want soberness, seriousness, and reasonableness. They want the saving message of the Lord Jesus Christ. They want concern, love, and kindness, and as one writer said, “They want the good news of Jesus Christ.” Paul was bold and blunt, but believable.

Paul’s Love and Dedication to the Corinthians

Paul’s apostleship is restated in 2 Corinthians 11:6-12. Paul was self-subsisting. He asked, “What sin did I commit? Did I abase or lower myself in making tents for a living in order that you may be elevated by the gospel? I made no charge to you for preaching that gospel” (Acts 18). The critics

heaped contempt on Paul because he didn't receive support from Corinth. They also accused him of robbing the churches because of an offering for others. According to Greek customs, a teacher was to make his living out of teaching. It was, therefore, considered beneath the dignity of a free man to work as Paul had as a tentmaker, with his own hands to support himself. That was offensive to the proud Greek because slaves did that kind of work. There are accounts in secular history of Augustus Caesar paying Barius Flatus, the rhetorician, an annual salary of approximately half a million dollars.

Paul figuratively said that he "robbed" other congregations, accepting support from them to serve the Corinthian brethren. He did not become a burden to them, and he said that if he ran short, he took nothing for free. Anything he needed was fully met by the brethren who came from Macedonia.

The word "narcotics" comes from the word "burden" in 2 Corinthians 11:9. It actually means "to be numbed, to grow stiff, or to be in a stupor." It was less than honorable to some at Corinth for Paul to be a hard physical worker. Paul had indicated in 1 Corinthians 9 that if he had received support from them, it would have become a hindrance to the gospel of Christ. He wouldn't ask for support while receiving support from other churches. Paul's love for the Corinthians was undeniable and well known to God. Not only would Paul be an example to others in being self-sustaining (Acts 20:35ff), but he would be in touch as a worker. He had all the pressures and frustrations of a working man, and so he became all things to all men to save some (1 Corinthians 9).

The Judaizers and Lying Apostles

Notice Paul's comparison with the Judaizers in 2 Corinthians 11:13-12. In 11:13 he really described the Judaizers. He said that what he was doing he would continue to practice. He was trying to cut the ground from underneath those (the lying apostles) who would seize any chance to put

their vaunted apostleship on the same level as his—apostle of Christ. Paul said that the lying men were “sham apostles.” It was a shame that they were sham apostles, crooked in all of their practices. Paul was committed to fully exposing these lying apostles and to stopping their influence and teaching. So many people today are being destroyed because of false teaching, and it seems that very few possess and manifest the courage in the nature of Christ to stand up and confront false teachers. We must love all people, but our love for God must impel us to expose the errors and deeds of darkness. Ephesians 5:12 says, *“For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.”*

The Deceiver and his Deacons

The devil's deacons (servants) disguise themselves as the Lord's apostles. They must be seen for what they really are, not what they appear to be. They were simply masquerading as apostles of Jesus Christ. They were deceitful workmen, and deceitful means “alluring, baiting or ensnaring.” They were scheming, conspiring and deceiving against Paul and against the church at Corinth. Paul said that there was nothing surprising about such tactics. Since Satan had started such practice, the only thing that Satan could do was pretend or deceive. There is no truth in him at all. Jesus said that he is a liar and was from the very beginning (John 8:44). God said that the serpent used by Satan in Genesis 3 was more subtle than other creatures, which means more crafty and cunning. He will not meet people openly and forthrightly, but he will approach people disguised as one who wants to serve or help. He wants to give the impression of helping others. He is the deceiver of the whole world.

In Revelation 12:9 there is a statement made concerning Satan,

The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole

world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Much can be learned in the book of Revelation about Satan's devices. He doesn't come to us in red clothing with horns, a tail and a pitchfork. We would surely run away from a creature like that. He came to the people in the first century, in the Roman empire, disguised as an eternal ruler on earth, one who was invincible and unconquerable. Then he came as a religious lamb using the false teachers and the priests of Rome. Satan came as an alluring, very beautiful, seductive and desirable harlot whose company represented the worldliness of Rome. If this harlot was purchased, its company and pleasures would supposedly fill all of the people's lives with all blessings and no eternal consequences. That was the kind of deceit that Satan employed then, and he employs the same kind of tactics today. He is deceitful. We have the might of the Word of God. We have the only weapon, the word of truth, to confront and demolish Satan's teaching, influence, and even his servants.

Paul's Reason for Boasting

Paul gave the reason for his boasting in 2 Corinthians 11:16-21. He talks about the boasting that he had a right to make. He says in 11:16-17,

I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool.

He acknowledged that this was not the way the Lord normally taught. The Lord didn't spend as much time in choice satire and irony as Paul did to get the attention of the brethren who had been deceived by these teachers.

2 Corinthians 11:18-21a says,

Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!

Such strong irony and bitter sarcasm is used here. Paul discussed the spiritual sins of these false workers, and their false charge against his apostolic authority. Some had been deceived into thinking that his authority had to be ruthless, dictatorial and domineering, or even that he didn't have any authority at all. They would come in and take over the situation, and then they would destroy individual freedom and take advantage of others. They would extract all the money possible from the church. These were the tactics of the false teachers who had come into the church at Corinth. It is difficult to imagine how they could have had any access, but they did. Paul said that if a man tyrannizes you, exploits you, gets you in his clutches, puts on airs or hits you in the face you put up with it. That is how the New English version translates the verse.

Paul's Boasting

Paul then ironically asked, "We have been weak?" He admitted the reproach, and the false teacher's boast was offset in 11:21b-33,

What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five

times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of Damascus guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

Notice that Paul took God to witness once again against his soul if he is not telling the truth. From irony Paul demonstrated an attitude of strong declaration, and if they were to be so bold in their deceit, he would be bold in truth. He spoke of the equality that he had in his lineage. In all of this Paul proved his superiority, and in doing this he exposed himself to many perils and the dangers. Why did Paul make this long list? If it was necessary to bring to the Corinthian's minds the things that he had experienced by the grace of God, then he would do so. If this would help them to make a contrast between one who is genuine as an apostle of Christ and the futility and the sinfulness of these false lying apostles, then Paul had accomplished his purpose.

The Apostle Paul's Vision

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul discussed his weaknesses. He referred to them in 2 Corinthians 11, and continued to discuss the weaknesses in his physical body. Paul says in 12:1-10,

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

In this passage, Paul was obligated to boast if he was to rescue the brethren from the false teachers. He cited his credentials as an apostle by telling of a certain vision and revelation. A vision is an experience in which scenes are made

to appear before the mind as clearly as if they were seen with the physical eyes, and a revelation is an uncovering of some truth which was before unknown. Paul received other visions as well. In Acts 9:3-6 Paul saw that Ananias would come and baptize him into Christ. In Acts 16 Paul and the brethren were given the vision telling them to go into Macedonia and preach Christ. In Acts 22 Paul was given the vision of going to Rome to be a witness for the Lord. He tells about the vision he received from the Lord and his appointment as an apostle of Christ (Acts 26:12ff.).

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul spoke of his vision and revelation in the third person to downplay any possible suggestion of pride on his part. He said that this vision occurred fourteen years earlier, and that was approximately ten years after Paul's conversion to Christ. That was also about the time when Paul and Barnabas were co-laborers with the Lord in the cities of Antioch and Syria (Acts 11ff.).

Paul Caught Up to the Third Heaven

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul referred to the third heaven. This was the Jews' way of discussing God's dwelling place. They believed the first heaven described the atmosphere around man and the earth. The second heaven was where the stars and planets were, and the third heaven was the invisible realm where God's throne is. Heaven is the realm of existence which is invisible to the human eye, but is as real as anything that is visible to the physical man.

This vision really happened, even though Paul did not know whether he was in or out of the body when it did. From this is learned that man may be conscious out of the body, so man is something more than the physical. The consciousness does not cease when man is out of the body.

Paul in Paradise

Paul's experience in Paradise was indescribable. He heard words so secret that human lips may not repeat them. Paul saw

and heard things that he was not allowed to talk about. He was restrained from revealing what he saw and heard. This apostle showed remarkable self-control to keep such secrets over so many years.

The word "Paradise" is used to describe Eden as God's garden. In Luke 23:43 the Lord made a promise to the penitent thief on the cross. Since the thief wouldn't be present on the Pentecost to become a citizen in the kingdom of God, he said to Christ, the Lord, "*Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" The thief was not going to be there on the day of Pentecost to become a part of the kingdom because he was about to die. Therefore the Lord said, "*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*" The Lord promised that his spirit would be with His that very day in Paradise. From this is concluded that Paradise is the same as the dwelling place of God in heaven. The Lord, in that same context, said in Luke 23:46, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*"

Paul was caught up through the dimensions of time and space, outside the realm of the physical, and was immediately taken into the spiritual realm where our living Christ dwells. It is a beautiful place where the redeemed will enjoy perfect fellowship, everlasting goodness and participation with the Father and with the forgiving, powerful, compassionate, and loving Jesus. While the body is indwelt, this Paradise that God has for us is seen by faith. Nonetheless, it is real and sure, and by faith we are sure and certain (Hebrews 11:1). Paul must have been so awestruck with the greatness, the majesty, the holiness, the power and the beauty of God. If God had allowed Paul to describe his vision, we couldn't comprehend it. Regardless, we are firmly secure in the fullness of God's complete revelation of the Scriptures.

Paul's Own Weaknesses

Paul did not continue to discuss this experience. By mentioning it, he could make many kinds of comparisons

between himself and the false apostles, because he was speaking the truth. He said on his own behalf, "I will just glory in my human, physical weaknesses." Paul acknowledged and accepted the possibility that God had manifested His power and grace because of such weaknesses. This section needs to be understood and appreciated today. Paul did not wish to be accepted just on the basis of this vision experience, but on what they had seen and heard in his ordinary day by day life as God's servant. Paul didn't get into Paradise by his own goodness and strength. He was caught up or snatched away into that glorious place. In view of all the great experiences and all the privilege given to Paul, he still would not boast. He said that we should not dare to boast of anything we do, only in our Lord Jesus Christ. In Romans 3:27,28, 1 Corinthians 1, and Ephesians 2, we are told that we are not saved by works lest any man should boast. Rather, we are saved by grace through faith.

The Apostle Paul's "Thorn"

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, in order to keep Paul from being unduly elated by the magnificence of such revelations, he was given a sharp pain in his body. The Greek word *skolops* is translated "thorn" in this text, and it is used to denote anything pointed such as a stake or a stick. Some say it was a sharp stake used for torturing or impaling someone. It was a physical, painful, and humiliating affliction. Notice that it was in the flesh, not psychological. Since the word "torment" or "buffet" are in present tense, this thorn continually harassed Paul. Paul lived with this pounding beating stake being driven into his flesh day by day, for fourteen long years. It is not known precisely what it was. Some have assumed it to be an eye disease, based upon Galatians 4:15 and 6:11. Some said it was malaria or even epilepsy. However, what it was is not known, and besides, this is irrelevant to us today. Paul was not the only person to have a thorn in the flesh. Some today are born with such a thorn, and they have to rely on God's grace day by day.

This thorn came as Satan's messenger to bruise Paul and to save him from conceit.

Satan was permitted to harass Job (Job 1-2), and he was permitted to tempt our Lord Jesus. However, whatever Satan does is only by the permission of God. "Evil," one writer said, "is never out of control of an absolutely good God." From the Scriptures we read and therefore believe in Satan's limited powers. He cannot do anything without God's permission and oversight. Paul's pain in the flesh was to keep him from being unduly elated and thus losing the grace of God. It reminded Paul each minute that he was sufficient of himself only through God's grace. He needed God's grace so desperately, and he willingly submitted himself to whatever it took to stay in God's grace.

God's Grace is Sufficient

The goodness and holiness of Jesus worked through people while He was here on the earth by the power of persuasion. While here, He worked on that which was matter and physical by sheer force or miracles. His spiritual power worked only through those who allowed themselves to come under the persuasive disciplining power of His grace. Grace or love is the most persuasive power there is. If grace cannot mold a person into someone God can enjoy and use, then nothing else can. Grace is all-sufficient, and Paul needed nothing else. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 God said to Paul, "*My grace is sufficient for you . . .*" This means that the power of God is made perfect in weakness. The world believes that sufficiency is man's power, political strength, fame and wealth, or political freedom, but all of these things will perish with use. The word "perfect" (12:9) means "to bring something to its goal, purpose or fulfillment." The constant pain of Paul's thorn was being used to bring grace to its intended goal, namely a person conformed to the image of God's Son (Romans 8:29). The purpose that God has for us in our experiences is to make us Christ-like.

Paul prayed three times. (That shows that one can pray

repeatedly, and those prayers will not be vain repetitions.) The answer came back from God, "No." God hears and answers prayer, and according to His great wisdom and love, He answers them either "Yes," or "No." God said, "*My grace is sufficient . . .*," The word "sufficient" denotes rule, sovereignty or enthroning. God said to Paul that His grace must rule as sovereign in his life while he endured the pain of the thorn in the flesh, which was necessary to humble and perfect him.

Delight in Hardships

In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul said that he would delight in weaknesses, insults or insolent words toward him. He would delight in hardships. "Hardship" means to be "hard up" or "destitute." Persecution means to be "chased or hounded." He would take delight in difficulties. Why? Because when he was weak, he was made strong. This is a key thought. When weak, the grace and power of the Lord, makes one strong. The Lord's power is most clearly demonstrated in weak vessels. Strength and pride in man get in the way of a demonstration of God's power because humility and weakness are better suited to demonstrate the wisdom and power of God. God wanted the power of Christ to rest upon Paul more than He wished to have the thorn removed after he learned the will of the Lord and the purpose of such pain.

Paul Reaffirmed as an Apostle

Paul reaffirmed his credentials as an apostle of Christ beginning in 2 Corinthians 12:11-12. The militant minority had tried to convince the church that Paul didn't have the bearing of a true apostle. Paul responds, "Your idea of an apostle is foolishness, and so you are to think in terms of what God requires."

Paul's Love and Concern for the Corinthians

2 Corinthians 12:11–13:14

Signs of A True Apostle

A minority in the church at Corinth was trying to determine what an apostle of Christ was in terms of human wisdom and worldly signs. They drove Paul into the foolish game of comparing, or glorying, when they should have defended his personal integrity and credentials as an apostle of Christ. Paul acknowledged that he was nothing, that he was unschooled and maybe even unpleasant to look at. Regardless, he was in no way inferior to, nor did he fall short of these “super-duper” apostles. Paul had shown the marks of a true apostle among them. He had shown constant fortitude in his forbearance with them, and he had confirmed the gospel message with signs, wonders, and miracles. 2 Corinthians 12:11-13 say,

I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the ‘super-apostles,’ even though I am nothing. The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance. How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

In Hebrews 2:3-4 it is seen how God was when He was with the apostles. He was with them and the other first-century

servants confirming the Word and the great salvation, through miracles, signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit. Paul shows us how God confirmed the apostolic message. Signs indicate that the power from the Holy Spirit signified God's presence and power to confirm His Word. Wonders indicate the effects of miracles, and that they prove that the events which transcend the laws of nature had truly occurred among them.

Paul, A True Apostle

Paul had the credentials of an apostle of Christ. He had seen the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1). There had been the performing of miracles. He had been selected and sent out directly by the Lord as an apostle of Christ (Acts 26:16-18). The marks of a true apostle were there in Corinth, and Paul asked them if they had forgotten what those marks were. He said, "These things were done in your midst, accomplished in the city of Corinth, and you have observed them." There wasn't anything in which they were treated worse than other congregations, except that Paul never sponged upon them. He said, "How unfair of me. Forgive me this wrong for I crave your forgiveness!" Paul used sharp irony and sarcasm, keen and cutting. He demolished the position of the false apostles and those who had accepted them.

Paul Wanted the Corinthians' Love

Paul then explained his self-subsistence. He said in 2 Corinthians 12:14-21,

Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty

fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent you? I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not act in the same spirit and follow the same course? Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

Notice Paul's purpose for his upcoming visit (12:14-16). He wanted their loyalty, devotion and love, not their money. Paul viewed himself as a parent, and they were his children in the gospel. He referred to that a number of times in this entire book. He said that parents should make provision for their children, and not children for their parents. As for Paul he would gladly spend what he had for them; he would spend himself to the very limit.

Sacrificial Service

In view of the context it seems as though Paul added another mark of a true apostle, and that is sacrificial service. In 2 Corinthians 12:19 Paul stated that his whole aim was to build up the Corinthians. How much edifying had the "superlative apostles" done? None. Instead, they were tearing apart and tearing down what God had done. What had the "super-duper" apostles given to Corinth? They weren't giving; they were

taking. What a vivid contrast! Paul was not contradicting what he taught in other passages (1 Timothy 5; Ephesians 6:2) concerning the children's obligation to honor and support their aged parents. Paul was referring here to young children who were still at home and in need of the father's support. Paul said that he would gladly spend. He was willing to be spent, or consumed—exhausted on behalf of one's soul. "Spent" means to be used up or to be depleted of energy, power and earthly possessions for spiritual good. Paul had shown them abundant love, and as a problem child they repaid Paul with rejection and less love.

Some had said that Paul was a crafty and unscrupulous-type fellow. He was not taking financial support from them since they had been deceived into thinking that an apostle would have taken their money, lorded it over them and made a circus show of his miraculous power. Paul said, "Forgive me of this right," and again he used sarcasm. His answer was straightforward, because some had inferred that Paul would possibly line his pockets with some of the money collected for the poor Jewish saints (2 Corinthians 8-9). However, they knew that neither Paul nor Titus had acted dishonestly or taken any advantage of them. This must have grieved Paul that they even thought this, but Paul didn't quit, nor did he refrain from answering the critics. He didn't refrain from continuing to seek their perfecting in good. Paul was a great man and a servant of Christ!

In the study of 2 Corinthians, Paul is seen as a tremendous servant of Christ. His earnestness and fears were expressed in 12:20-21. Paul said that in all of his statements he had not been trying to justify himself, because his message was inspired. This message was from God the Father and the Holy Spirit of God. The words were for strengthening and building up (construction or edification.) The Judaizers were tearing down the faith. Paul's entire effort in chapter 12 was not to build up his own reputation, but to strengthen the people.

Paul's Concern

Paul expressed his great concern about his forthcoming third visit. He said, "*For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be.*" This was because Paul was going to have to be very bold and courageous. He would have to exercise some corrective chastening power. He said that his purpose in writing this epistle before was to spare himself any sharp exercise of authority which the Lord gave him for building up when he came. It was not for pulling others down (2 Corinthians 13:10). Paul feared that some had not repented as of yet.

Unrepented Sins

There is a command from which we never graduate as servants of the Lord. We always live a penitent life, changing that which is evil so that we might become more and more like Christ. Paul said that he was fearful that he would find them still quarreling or giving themselves to strife and jealousy. Envy is zeal in the wrong sense: angry tempers, personal rivalries, competition, slander (speaking against one another), the reviling of one another or gossip. (Gossip is whispering, telling lies or being conceited or puffed up.) All of these types of chaotic riots and disorders were still in the body of Christ, and to this list he added impurity which is moral or spiritual dirtiness and sexual sins such as fornication, debauchery, lewdness, perversity and moral wickedness. In our society today hardly any wickedness could be worse than that of Corinth in the time of the apostle Paul. Paul feared that these unrepented sins would be proof that his labor had been in vain. That would be humbling to Paul, and he would shed tears of mourning. He would be devastated as a father would be toward his own children. This would not be a weak father but a merciful father, and if necessary he would demonstrate the chastening power of such a father in the faith.

Final Warning

In 2 Corinthians 13:1-10 is the final warning:

This will be my third visit to you. 'Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

Warning of Impending Discipline

Paul told them to get ready for a formal hearing. He said that all of the slanderous words against his apostleship and ministry would be brought into the open. There would be a demand that the charges be proved by the witnesses that thought that Paul was a false apostle. They would be

repudiated, and Paul would vindicate his character and integrity. If the brethren were true disciples, they would be glad to clear up any charges against the apostle Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 13:2 Paul repeated his warning to those who had sinned in the past and to everyone else as well. He gave this warning orally when he was there in his second visit, and in this passage he gave it to them in his absence. When he was to go the next time, he would show no leniency. In his second visit, Paul had not demanded evidence and witnesses, and he had let the matter pass, hoping that they would correct it. Then they accused Paul of weakness, so it was time for the truth to be established. Paul said there is great strength in weakness (13:3-4). He said, "You want some proof of my apostleship? You shall have it, but you will not like it." Earlier in his ministry, Paul had demonstrated the Spirit's power to punish false teachers (Acts 13:4ff.). On that occasion Elymas was made blind for a season because of his false teaching, and this was through the work of the Spirit through the apostle Paul. The authority of an apostle was demonstrated by Paul. The mature Christian didn't need constant or continual manifestation of the apostles' power. However, spiritual babes did, and there were many immature spiritual babes in the church of Corinth (1 Corinthians 3).

The Power of Christ

In looking at 2 Corinthians 13:3-4, some of the false brethren and teachers at Corinth had deceived some to think that Christ had been crucified because He was too weak to prevent His death. This is what some thought at Jerusalem until after His resurrection. It is a shame that some would not understand the willing nature of Jesus in laying down His life as a ransom for all. Christ is powerful enough to work in and be in you. He is powerful among you (13:3). The Lord has been powerful enough through His gospel to save all types of sinners. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 it is seen that Christ was powerful through the gospel at Corinth, and this power did not

come from the Law of Moses. Jesus made no struggle to prevent the cross, and He was innocent of all charges against Him. However, the literal, historical and actual resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead proved all His claims of divine power, moral perfection, supernatural revelation, and that He did not die in weakness. In the power of God, Christ's resurrection proved the power of His death to vicariously atone for all the sins of those who believe and trust in His grace. He proved by His resurrection that He had overcome the ultimate enemies of the human race—sin and death. That is power. No other human being has ever had that kind of power.

Exhortation to Self-examination

In 2 Corinthians 13:5-8 Paul said that the people needed to check or prove themselves. Teaching always produces self-examination. Preachers do not examine, but the Word of God examines people. Paul told them to test themselves. They were putting him to the test, so they were to prove that they were Christians. There was no way that they could prove they were Christians and leave Paul out of the picture. If they claimed to be Christians, they were to prove it. Their explanation would be, "Well, a fellow by the name of Paul came here, and taught, and we responded to his message, and we were made Christians." There was no way the Corinthians could prove themselves without proving that Paul was a true servant of the Lord, and that was the thrust of Paul's statement in this context. *"Examine yourselves . . . Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"* Paul didn't use an emotional and subjective approach, but he told them to take the objective, the revealed word of God, and test themselves.

No person has the right to say that the words of Scripture mean something different today than they meant in the first century. It means exactly the same today as when it was written. The moral principles never change, and the doctrinal concepts are absolute. They never change. We rest our

confidence in the revealed word of God. The Scriptures cannot be altered; they are a perfect, absolute standard by which every man must examine himself to see whether or not he is in the faith. God's standards never vary.

Paul's Final Exhortation and Promise

In 13:9-10 Paul desired to build them up. He said, "... *our prayer is for your protection,*" or "for your improvement" which literally means to set in order again, to restore or to repair. His farewell is in 13:11-14.

Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints send their greetings. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Notice Paul's final plea, exhortation and promise. He told them to mend their ways. They were to be restored, and take their appeal (Paul and Titus') to heart. Paul told them to agree with one another and to be harmonious in thought and aim. They were to live in peace and greet one another with a holy kiss. This was the ancient custom of greeting in the first century, and generally it was to kiss one upon the cheek or forehead. It was given by men to men and women to women. Paul told them to live in peace, to straighten themselves out. Here is the great benediction: Christian maturity depends upon our relationship with the Godhead. If we have the grace of Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we need nothing more.

Review of 2 Corinthians

In the first part of the book Paul said, "*I want to explain to you how God is the Father of mercies and the God of all*

comfort.” There is a tremendously encouraging section concerning God’s continual strengthening of those who are in any pressure and affliction. Paul cited himself as one that needed that kind of comfort from the Lord because of his experience of having the sentence of death upon him.

Paul’s Defense of His Ministry

Paul then started to make the defense of his ministry. He explained why he had to change his mind, and why it was necessary for him to delay his coming to Corinth. He wanted to spare them the sharp rebuke and reproof (2 Corinthians 13) that he might have to use in person. He was hopeful that the word of God would accomplish its purpose, and he would not have to rebuke them in person. If one has the misconception that the apostle Paul was one who liked to reprove and rebuke people sharply, then he can learn differently in 2 Corinthians. Paul is not of that nature. If the necessity is there, he will use the authority to bring about a correction, a public disciplinary action or public church correction. However, Paul preferred not to do that. He pleaded with them through the meekness and gentleness of Christ over and over again that they needed to be the kind of person that they ought to be.

Repentance of the Immoral Man

In 2 Corinthians 2 Paul explained how the epistle of 1 Corinthians had accomplished its purpose and had caused the immoral man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 to repent. Paul said that the punishment that had been inflicted upon the man by the majority had been sufficient. The three-fold response and obligation was to forgive and saturate the situation with much grace, to comfort him, and to stand by him continually and validate their great love and esteem for him. He said that this man was not to be overcome with excessive grief and sorrow. He was to be given to a godly sorrow that works repentance to salvation (2 Corinthians 5). He didn’t need to be reminded of his sinfulness over and over again. He had repented of that, and

he needed to know that the Lord had forgiven him and was going to treat him as though he had never sinned. The brethren were to treat him the same way that Jesus treated him. They were to reaffirm and validate their great love and esteem for him, for they were not ignorant of Satan's devices.

Tactics of the False Teachers

In the latter part of 2 Corinthians 2 Paul began to describe the tactics of the false teachers. This chapter describes the deceitful nature of the false teachers who improperly handled the Word of God. Then in chapter 3 Paul began to uphold the great ministry in which he was involved. This is the same ministry that we are involved in today: the ministry of righteousness and the preaching of Christ, Him crucified and the good news concerning salvation in the Lord. Paul contrasted a false ministry with the lying teachers who had come in and tried to bind the Old Law upon the church as a means of justification by law and works. Paul said that the ministry of these teachers was a ministry of death.

Do Not Lose Heart

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul encouraged us to not lose heart because of the kind of ministry that we have. We must keep on. Paul spoke again of the deceitfulness of Satan, the god of this world, and how he deceives the minds and hearts of many people to keep them away from the light of the gospel of Christ and the nature of our Lord as seen in the gospel of Christ. In this chapter he told of some of his experiences and how the Lord had made him more than a conqueror through them. In the latter part of chapter 4 he told us why he never lost heart. He said that he did not just look at the things around him. He looked at the things that are eternal and unseen, the things that are beyond physical recollection and observation. He tells us to look at the things that are eternal and unseen, and though our outward man is perishing, the inward man is being renewed day by day. He said that the afflictions in this world were only

light afflictions, yet the dangers to which Paul had subjected himself for the sake of Christ were anything but “light or momentary.” He said,

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.

Faith and the Ministry of Reconciliation

In the first part of 2 Corinthians 5 Paul kept his eye of faith on the glorified body. He said, “*We live by faith, not by sight*” (5:7). Then he described the judgment to come and its motivation in his life as a servant of Christ. Next he went into a deep discussion of the ministry of reconciliation, which is our ministry. It is a ministry that reconciles people back to God and restores friendship and harmony. In chapter 6 Paul pleaded with them to flee from idolatry and to have no fellowship with such things. In the following chapter, 2 Corinthians 7, Paul spoke of the greatness of godly grief and sorrow that works repentance to salvation and brings no regret. He spoke of his elation and joy when Titus came and gave him a good report of the happenings in the church at Corinth.

Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 8 and 9 discuss grace giving. These chapters show the need of grace giving in our lives today. We must allow God's favor to be at work in us. This then will cause us to lovingly and cheerfully purpose in our heart to give, and then fulfill and complete that purpose as Corinth was admonished to do in the matter of their giving.

Apostleship Upheld and a Tender Appeal

Then in the last section, 2 Corinthians 10-13, Paul tried to refute the position of the lying apostles and the brethren who

had been deceived by them. Paul spoke of the militant minority and their need of repentance. He upheld time and time again his qualities and qualifications as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then after proving his apostleship and demolishing the position of the lying apostles, Paul made a tender appeal as the book is brought to a marvelous conclusion. In 2 Corinthians 13:11, 14 he made this appeal,

Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you . . . May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C. W. "Abe" Lincoln

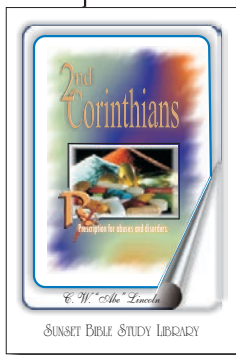


Abe was born and reared on a farm near Sweetwater, Texas. He graduated from Sweetwater High and won for himself a scholarship to TCU and later transferred to ACC, now ACU, from which he received his B.S. Degree in 1950.

Brother Lincoln's first venture was as a high school principal and football coach. Sundays were always devoted to a greater contest than athletics, as he proclaimed the Gospel of Christ. His first love soon emerged as the victor and thus he dedicated full time to the work of an evangelist.

Abe's over forty years on the firing line for the Lord took him to works in Iowa, Odessa, Midland and Fort Worth, Texas and over thirty years teaching in the *Sunset International Bible Institute* in Lubbock. In the late fifties, the Lincoln family labored with the Tex Williams family in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, for three years. Abe was working locally as both evangelist and elder with the church in Seminole, Texas along with his teaching duties in the *Sunset International Bible Institute* when he was called home to be with the Lord in February of 1997.

While at ACU, Abe met and married Dot Dollar. They have a son, Steve, and a daughter, Becky.



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