



## 2 CORINTHIANS STUDY GUIDE

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## Preliminaries

### Dedication

These notes are dedicated with gratitude to my loving wife, Anne, whose role as a loving helpmate has enabled me in all my endeavors for Christ during the past forty years. Her constant encouragement, wise input, and helpful assistance have affirmed her full partnership in all of our endeavors.

### Publication Notice

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These and similar materials represent a work of love added into an already full schedule. Suggestions for improvement and clerical adjustments are always welcomed. Contact: [jpbrowser1@yahoo.com](mailto:jpbrowser1@yahoo.com)

### The nature of this study:

Pastors looking for a deeply exegetical treatment of Corinthians will not find it here. While every effort has been made to respect the Greek and use it when appropriate and necessary, the notes in this text contain a mix of both information and exhortation. They are designed to be read and understandable by adults in general. They are in a format which lends easily for use in preaching and in teaching.

### A Word About the Author

Jim Steel has served equally in church planting, missions, and Christian education endeavors. His doctrinal position is available at [www.BreadcrumbsMinistries.com](http://www.BreadcrumbsMinistries.com). His ministry has focused heavily on the centrality of Christ and he stands without apology for the full and complete inspiration of the Bible and the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through the sacrifice of our risen Christ. Dr. Steel, who is an instructor at Cornerstone Bible Institute in Hot Springs, South Dakota, is available for personal contact through the web site noted above.

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## An Introduction to 2 Corinthians

Intro: Our goal today is just *to stick our toes into the water* and get just a glimpse of where we are heading in our new study of 2 Corinthians. In any biblical study you will benefit by taking notes. If you are not much of a note taker you may still wish to consider owning a Bible which provides you with a little marginal space on each side of the text. That way, you can at least make some comments adjacent to verses that are being covered. You will be pleased at how productive and helpful it is, years later, to discover these notes and comments.

For today, however - let's just have a little breakfast for the brain by settling in first, on **The Setting**, and then, on **The Servant**. Let's talk about:

### The Setting of 2 Corinthians

I have spared you from any detailed investigation of the background of Corinthians - but if you would like an excellent discussion of the background and writing of this book, along with a presentation of the issues which are outstanding, don't hesitate to order Colin Kruses' paperback book on 2 Corinthians in the Tyndale Series. This is the first work I have read by Kruse and I have been very pleased with his scholarship.

Even so, for our purposes we will set *most* of the scholarship aside and just try to get the big picture.

Corinth, itself, was a showcase Grecian city which was the capital of Achaia. For it's time it was a large city which had grown inordinately fast - due, primarily to its ideal location for trading. Corinth had the "*best*" of everything, a cosmopolitan "*New York City*" of the Roman Empire. The best of the arts, athletics, education, and iniquity were all to be found there.

*Paul first preached the Gospel in Athens* and then went to Corinth as we read in our scripture reading today. His church planting period went for a year and a half during which both Jews and Gentiles were saved.

Among the list of famous converts were Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, Erastus (chamberlain of the city) and Gaius - a man of great wealth. As usual, however, most of those who were saved were of the poor and downtrodden.

Do you remember what Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:26? He said:

*1Co 1:26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, [are called]: (AV)*

God is not interested in our family tree, our wealth, or or the level of our religious fervency. The Bible speaks of those who came to Christ in John 1:11

*Joh 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (AV)*

This is wonderful, because it means that you have a chance to be saved today.

The day came when Paul left Corinth, ostensibly, to attend the feast at Jerusalem - According to Acts 18:21. He then left Jerusalem and spent an additional 3 years at Ephesus, according to Acts 20:31.

It was during the last part of this stay when reports began coming to Paul about the work in Corinth and how spiritual life had degenerated there. The household of Chloe, for example, reported to Paul concerning all of the division at Corinth. The list of troubles in the Corinthian church can be easily discovered by reading Paul's first letter to Corinth, or 1 Corinthians.

Now, according to 1 Corinthians 16:8 Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote that letter and had planned to stay there until Pentecost. It was probably about the year 57.

The second epistle to the Corinthians was probably written a short time after the first letter and it was probably written from Thessalonica. It had been Paul's intention to visit Corinth once again, but he had been hindered temporarily, so he sent Timothy and Erasmus on ahead. In the meantime, we believe he received a report from Titus on how his first letter had been received. This was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it had encouraged Paul to see how the Corinthians were seeking to obey his instructions. On the other hand, it required Paul to answer some charges concerning some attacks which were made on his own character and motives. We will see these things as we take the book of 2 Corinthians off the shelf and dust it off. One of the remarkable things you will see as we move to our second point of the study - is how stable Paul is - how capable he is of handling criticism - how well he handled difficulty when it arose. So, having looked at the setting, let's look at the one whom God chose to write this book. Let's examine:

## **II. The Servant - The Apostle Himself**

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

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

The greeting in front of us is a textbook greeting. First, it is a standard Greek A to B greeting with the usual "From - To" salutation which was common to all letters of the period. But, secondly, it has been enhanced as a Christian Greeting, and that is the key to our understanding. We notice several significant changes to the typical Greek salutation. They are each here for a good reason.

### **A. Paul has an Agenda.**

To begin, instead of just saying, "Paul" or "Paul of Tarsus" we read: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother."

This is because Paul has an agenda. It is clearly Paul's intention to establish his authority as an apostle at the very onset. Later, we will understand why it was necessary for Paul to do this another time with the Corinthians. For our purposes, we will just remind ourselves that the alternative to authority is anarchy, be it in the government, the community, the school, the church, or the home. God demands respect for authority. Pastor/elders, even though not Apostles, must also be willing to assert biblical authority. When they do not; when they "trust the Lord to work things out" and abrogate their duties as leaders, Satan diminishes their effectiveness. Fathers and husbands, even though not apostles, must also be willing to assert biblical authority. Your home is not a democracy. It is an institution chartered by the King.

At the same time, that authority must come from God. Whatever position we fill must be filled according to the will of God. There are many today who are speaking in the name of God who have not been sent by God.

Jeremiah recorded:

*Jer 23:21 I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. (AV)*

These charlatans are easy to spot by folks who know God's Word, but they are quick to prey on the young in the faith, their prime target, and those who have not learned to feed on the scriptures themselves. They are all around us. Pastors could name a new one each Sunday from their pulpits.

Now, we know that a person's authority does not come from God when his words contradict the Word of God. Isaiah warned:

*Isa 5:20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (AV)*

When someone comes along and tells you that he has new information which supersedes what you have learned in this book you know you are dealing with a false teacher.

Paul, on the other hand, was an Apostle, an apostle sent by the will of God. But, unlike the other apostles, Paul continually had to defend his apostleship because he was the one apostle who was saved after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. That's one reason.

Another reason why Paul's authority was challenged was that, I believe, the Apostles had replaced Judas with the wrong man, Matthias. Following Peter's inimitable impulsive leadership they voted in the wrong man, therefore, precluding the right man. It is not that Matthias did us any harm; it is that his selection hindered Paul in filling his rightful position. When churches select pastors they would do well to ask themselves, is this the man God wants us to have *at this time*? A poor choice may hurt all of the parties involved, the man who was called, his family, the man who was not called, and the church itself.

So, this is not a typical Greek greeting because Paul uses it as an occasion to assert his apostolic authority right up front.

**B. This is an atypical greeting, for any letter.**

He begins, "Paul...and Timothy, our brother". This is not to suggest that a letter could not have more than one author, but it would be unthinkable that an elevated teacher would include his disciple's name on the letterhead, so to speak. We sense in Paul, right at the onset, a spirit of equality. While he asserted that authority we talked about a moment ago, we see a precious commonality in Paul exhibiting no presumption and no self-importance. We will readily see in 2 Corinthians what we have seen everywhere else; Paul is a team player, but he is not just another team member.

### **C. The word "grace" is not a typical Greek Greeting.**

This is seen in the choice of words which Paul makes. He says in the beginning of verse 2:

*2 Cor. 1:2 ¶ Grace be to you.*

There is here, another subtle change in the wording which Greeks would be quick to notice. The typical Greek greeting would, in the Greek be *chairein*. Chairein means "to rejoice, to thrive well, or salutations!" Now, it is true that James, in his general epistle, does use this word as a greeting in James 1:1

*Jas 1:1 ¶ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*

This "greeting" is also used a couple of times in Acts. But Paul, in his letters, substitutes a word which *only* the Christians used. It is the Greek *charis*, or Grace. Grace, grace to you!

Our realization of this doctrine of grace begins at the moment of salvation when the true meaning of Newton's song dawns on us:

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved,  
How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed.

From the momentous instant when we begin this salvation journey until the day we are ushered into the presence of Christ, the word grace becomes sweeter, and sweeter, and sweeter all the time. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound! And not only does God provide grace for salvation and grace for dying, but He gives grace for living as well, grace for the day, and grace for the hour. Grace!

Now, so that a misunderstanding does not result, it may interest us to know that there is a hint of the word grace in that old Gentile word for greeting, *charein*, but it is only a hint. It is only in Christ that *charein* becomes *charis*, and the lights come on, the bud of life turns into a blossom, and the eyes are opened.

There is one practice, yea there are two, (to coin Solomon) asserted by pagans which grind me to the quick and bring out the worst in my repertoire of responses. They are the fingernails on the chalkboard of my soul.

The first is when TV commercials and TV comedies dare to use the Hallelujah Chorus in their foolish antics. Every time something funny happens some scriptwriter thinks the Hallelujah Chorus belongs there. If these writers had one tenth of an ounce of understanding about the purpose and intent of that sacred piece they would never defile and profane it with their vile, earthy antics. Such characters are thieves, robbing the King of Glory of His rightful place and praise.



And the second nail on the chalkboard practice is when the world strikes up a chord and begins singing or typically, wailing "Amazing Grace!" Why am I so ingratiated by their choice of renditions? I am offended because no one has the right to sing amazing grace that has not been saved by grace. By using the Hallelujah Chorus in their commercials men rob the living God of His glory. By singing Amazing Grace, these unsaved Christ deniers seemingly rob the church of her treasure. These words belong to the redeemed, not to the world and its performers!

So, we see the word grace is more than just a greeting among believers; it is a testimony! It is a rallying point! It is the source of the joy and rejoicing we pray upon others! It is the communal word, the electric word which energizes all true believers everywhere. It is a bucket over the well of forgiveness which freely gives the water of life *only* to the unworthy, *only* to the wretches, *only* to the failures, and *only* to sinners such as we.

If you, the reader, see yourself as a failure, hopelessly lost in the eyes of God, you, and only you, are eligible for the grace of God. But dare to bring one thing in your hand; bring one offering, one good deed, one good character trait, and you will be turned away empty at the door of grace. Only the empty handed may turn in there. Only the desperate and dying need apply. This same Paul wrote concerning Christ in 2 Timothy 1:9

*2Ti 1:9 Who hath saved us, and called [us] with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (AV)*

#### **D. The word "peace," is not a typical Greek greeting.**

It is not that the Greeks did not use this word (eirene, εἰρηνε) as a greeting. They too, would have wished peace upon one another, but their conception of peace was a classical conception of peace.

The Greek conception of peace was negative. It was a desire for the absence of hostility. Peace, to the Greek mind, was simply the absence of turbulence and trouble. The Christian in Paul's time, used the same Greek word eirene, but he added a new dimension to it. The Christian used this word to translate the Hebrew word Shalom. This meant that the Christian's view of peace carried a much richer meaning. For the Christian, peace is not only the absence of hostility, it is the positive idea of wholeness and well being and satisfaction and fulfillment.

Now, what kind of peace do you have today? Is there satisfaction in your inner soul? Is there fullness? Is there a sense of wholeness and well being? It is the Christian contention that, in spite of all you may have read by new age counterfeiterers, this kind of pure satisfaction, this kind of wellness and wholeness of the soul, results only as a product of your new life in Christ!

Just as it is with grace, so it is with peace. There is a peace with God which comes at the time of salvation. Paul said:

*Ro 5:1 ¶ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: (AV)*

And then, we can experience the peace of God by learning to appropriate all that we are in Christ. Peace! Real peace! The lost commodity of our age is free for the taking.

Consider the shallow perception of the world. Even by examining a simple greeting such as this we see a stark contrast. We see that where Christianity goes it enhances and enriches the human experience. Wherever the world touches upon Christian terms it deprecates, re-defines, and diminishes them. There is, in Christ, a richness and fullness that cannot even be found in this old world. And, the more the world tries to portray true Christianity the more foolish it looks. True Christians know they have never seen Hollywood portray what a spirit filled Christian as he really is. The world cannot produce our hymns for us, and when it tries it fails utterly to convey anything beyond sentimental gibberish. It cannot fabricate a simple sermon as it is really preached in Bible believing churches. The world sees only the surface, and can't even replicate that correctly.

In something as simple as the opening greeting to one of Paul's letters we begin to see the great chasm between the Christian mindset and the world's mindset, between imagined grace and true grace, between imagined peace and true peace, and between fool's gold and real gold. After painting its false impression of Christianity on the canvass of our minds, the world does an about face and says, "Look how ugly it is, why would you want that?"

There *is* a Savior, there *is* a salvation, and there *is* a fountain of grace and love and forgiveness which runs so deep one can never dive to its depths. There is a change of heart and mind and perception so profound that one truly coming to Christ he will always look back and ask himself, *why was I satisfied with the imitation so long when the real thing was right within my grasp?*

Grace and peace, true grace and peace, can be yours in Christ today. You can experience true forgiveness, true salvation, true release, true wholeness and true peace.

## What Is The Church? - I

We want to look at the greeting once again, confining our discussion to a single word:

*2Co 1:1 ¶ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy [our] brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia: Grace [be] to you and peace from God our Father, and [from] the Lord Jesus Christ. (AV)*

Paul is writing unto the *church* of God which is at Corinth. Consider:

### I. The Presence of the Church

We have already explained how that biblical concepts and biblical vocabulary always enhances secular words and concepts, *never* vice versa. For example, the Biblical idea behind the word grace contains far more than a Greek allusion to perfection and beauty in form and motion, it carries us right to the heart of God. The Christian concept of peace is more than absence of turmoil, it is wholeness. Redemption is more than just a purchase. Salvation is far more than deliverance, and so on and so forth.

This is also true. Secularly, technically, the term ekklesia (ἐκκλησία) simply means called out ones or an assembly. In that broadest sense it can mean any group of people. For example, the rioters in Acts were a church. The word assembly which is found in Acts 19 is the Greek ekklesia. In another general context, Old Testament believers were also referred to as the church or assembly. Even idol temples could technically be called churches. When Paul was declared not to be a robber of churches in Acts 19:37 we read:

*Ac 19:37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. (AV)*

Temple robbers were viewed much like old west cowboys viewed horse thieves. So, we see that the term can be used in a very general sense.

But, then we see that the Bible expands its use of this word church. Our first hint of this expansion comes from the words of the Lord Jesus Himself who said to Peter:

*Mt 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (AV)*

What interests us about this verse is not just the "Peter" discussion, but also the fact that Christ is promising to build a church in the future which has not yet come about. You and I know that we are that church. We are that holy temple. Each of us is a living stone in this great edifice which God is building. Turn to Ephesians 2.

*Eph 2:19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; (AV) Eph 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner [stone]; (AV) Eph 2:21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: (AV) Eph 2:22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (AV)*

Our point is that we are beginning to see that something new is taking shape; a new definition for the church is beginning to form. A new church whose foundation was only built during the time of the apostles and prophets is now being fabricated.

This is the church we are talking about today. It is the church which the apostles discussed in Acts. They were the first to see it coming. James announced in Acts 15:14:

*Ac 15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. (AV)*

God would be taking out a people for His name from among the Gentiles.

These are some verses which help us understand a little about the presence of the church. There are few who deny that the church exists. But it is at this point that the fabrics of our various theologies begin to be woven, or perhaps we should say, unravel!

## II. The Properties of the Church

The Savior, who announced to Peter that He would build this church, also said that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. In other words, it would be a perpetual church. It would be ongoing. It is at this very point that the great continental divide in church doctrine occurs.

### A. The *Universal Church*

**There is one group of believers** who hold that Jesus Christ saw His church as consisting of all those who are in Christ, all of those who know Christ as Savior and all of those who are in the body of Christ. These folks are seen as the bride of Christ. In other words, they believe Jesus was talking about the church *universal* or the *positional* church. Such folks believe that this church is in two parts, the church triumphant which has gone on before, and the church militant which remains to carry out her charge. These folks also believe that members of Christ's church are obligated by God's Word to participate in local assemblies of called out believers. We call these assemblies local churches. Therefore we can say that this group believes in a universal (positional) church and that hopefully, local assemblies will be expressions of this one great church. This group would be quick to quote a passage such as Ephesians 4:3-6. [As a technical note, evangelicals and fundamentalists are wise not to use the term *mystical* church. It has special catholic connotations implying that we can have "mystic sweet communion" with those who've gone before. There is no mystical communion or prayer access to the saints who have died ahead of us.]

*Eph 4:3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [There is] one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who [is] above all, and through all, and in you all. (AV)*

### B. "Succession" Churches

**There is a second group of folks** that takes an entirely different viewpoint concerning Christ's church. This group would reject the things we have just listed. Folks included in this second group, for instance would be the Roman Catholic Church, the Churches of Christ, the Mormons, and many "Independent" Baptists. Obviously, the doctrines in these groups vary widely, but they all have one thing in common regarding the doctrine of the church. They all hold and teach one form or another of *succession*. These folks teach that Christ ordained and established an ongoing

physical church here on earth and that the rights to administer that church have been handed down successively.

While each of these groups have variations on the theme, the case of the "Independent" Baptists will serve as an adequate illustration for our purposes today. Remember, however, that not all Baptists are Independent. Not all Independent Baptists hold these convictions. A surprisingly large group does, however. I do not point out these groups to be critical, only to help you understand the issues which are involved. And, please remember that, just because the church down the street is independent and Baptist does not mean that it shares these teachings.

I have in front of me a tract which is widely circulated as an example of the Independent Baptist position. I want to highlight its points. The tract, written by Bert Craft is titled "*What It Means to Be An Independent Baptist*," and it uses the letters in the word Baptist to underscore its distinctives. According to Craft, then,

**B**ible KJV 1611 is preserved, sole authority.  
**A**lien immersion is not accepted  
**P**erpetuity of Jesus' church & His authority  
**T**rue, scriptural church is only local church  
**I**mperative of missions belongs to the church  
**S**alvation of grace by repentance and faith  
**T**able of the Lord is restricted to members.

Now, notice that list again - and notice how many of these issues relate the issue of succession.

~~**B**ible KJV 1611 is preserved, sole authority.  
**A**lien immersion is not accepted [by local church]  
**P**erpetuity of Jesus' church & His authority  
**T**rue, scriptural church is only local church  
**I**mperative of missions belongs to the church  
**S**alvation of grace by repentance and faith  
**T**able of the Lord is restricted to members.~~

If this doctrine of succession is true, we need to understand what these folks are saying. They are saying that *any time* baptism, the Lord's Table, church membership, missionary endeavors occur outside of the context of an independent Baptist church those practices are alien. They are *not* biblical.

And it goes even further. Because they believe there is no such thing as a universal church, only Christ's church on earth represented by those who hold these views, they are also forced to teach that the local church is the body of Christ and the bride of Christ.

Look at the book of Ephesians and notice how Paul introduces this book. He begins with the words:

*Eph 1:1 ¶ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: (AV)*

Now, looking at chapter 5, notice verses 23-25, a part of the familiar passage read at weddings.

*Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so [let] the wives [be] to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

The independent Baptist holds that Paul was here speaking of the local church. If *your* membership lapses, you are no longer a part of this body.

Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Cor 12:13 "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular." You probably thought you became a part of the body of Christ when you came to know Him as Savior. The independent Baptist says, and I quote Bert Craft, "We are water-baptized into the church of God (1 Cor. 12:13). And again, "Baptism qualifies us for membership in the body (church.)".

Lest there be any doubt in your mind, the independent Baptist does not recognize Bible church baptisms or any other baptism in which the church has not received, and I quote again now, "...authority from a church of like faith and practice." In other words, that authority comes from another Baptist church. He says that even many so-called independent Baptists are therefore unscriptural and their leaders need to humble themselves and be re-baptized with a Baptist baptism and reorganize their churches.

Now, if you believe in apostolic succession (as the Catholics and LDS do) or you believe in baptistic succession (as the Churches of Christ and "Independent" Baptists do, you need to know that you are in an alien meeting in a non-Baptist church, a meeting which, according to these Baptists, Jesus Christ Himself would not attend.

But, is that what God's word teaches? We'll answer that now.

### **III. The Principles of the Church**

Principles which truly are laid out in the church. Here is just a beginning of things we know to be true.

#### **A. The Holy Spirit places us into the Church, *not* water baptism.**

We cite the very passage which missionary Craft cited, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13:

*1Co 12:12 ¶ For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also [is] Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (AV)*

How many *Holy Spirits* did you count in that passage? There is one.  
How many *bodies* did you count in that passage? There is one.

There is one Spirit, not *many* pastors, who places us into one body. In other words, it is Spirit baptism, not water baptism under discussion. The Lord doesn't care whether you have a sign saying Bible Church, Bible Fellowship, or Baptist Church, hanging over your door. He cares about

whether you have been placed into Jesus Christ. If you have not been baptized into Jesus Christ you are not saved.

Paul explains this in Romans 6 when he reminds the local church in Rome:

*Ro 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also [in the likeness] of [his] resurrection: For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also [in the likeness] of [his] resurrection: (AV)*

If Romans 6 is talking about water baptism then it is water baptism which places you in Christ. It is water baptism which saves you. You belong in the Churches of Christ, in the Catholic Church, or in the Mormon Church if you teach that water baptism saves.

So, the first thing we have learned is that one Spirit baptizes all believers into one body.

### **B. Individual believers are recipients of the “Great Commission” in Matthew 28:19-20:**

*Mt 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen. (AV)*

Some folks have a notion when they read this verse that makes about as much sense as closing the barn door after the horse gets out. They say, see, the Lord is talking to the eleven disciples *only*. This command to teach and baptize all nations was only given to them.

Personally, I am certain that more than the 11 were there to receive that command, but the question remains, so what? Even if the command was given only to the disciples, it doesn't change the facts. Look at the command. What were they to teach all nations? They were to teach all nations to "Observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Any command which was given to *any* disciple or *any* apostle is to be given to *every* new convert!

Was special apostolic authority given to carry out those early tasks of clarifying what the New Covenant was? The answer is, yes! (2 Corinthians 12:12). But those signs related only to the task of confirming that a New Covenant had replaced the Old Covenant, the Law. Beyond that, the Lord did not give any of the apostles or disciples commands that He did not give to the rest of us. All of His teachings are for every believer.

And please, be sure to notice that there is not one single reference to a Baptist church or any other church in this passage.

If the Independent Baptists, Catholics, Churches of Christ, or Mormons were correct, the Lord Jesus would have, at the least, said He was speaking to the church, and at the most, commanded that the principles of succession be set down. No church is mentioned in Matthew 28, only individuals. Every command given to them was given to all believers everywhere.

In conclusion, nowhere in the Bible is any local church vested with any authority or privilege that individual believers are not vested with, except in the selection of their officers and exercise of their

disciplines. Baptism is not an ordinance (a tradition) of the local church, though it is most wisely celebrated in that context. Communion is not an ordinance of the local church, though it is most wisely celebrated in that context. Communion is practiced in the local church because we *come together* where believers are. Wisdom dictates that we celebrate the Lord's Table in the context of a local church and the ministry of the Word by spiritual leaders, but it is *not* the property of duly incorporated entities called churches and its privilege is *not* handed off from one church to another.

Why do we devote so much space to this issue?" Why the emphasis?

**1. Do not be intimidated by folks who imply that they are more biblical than you** because their standards are supposedly "higher." Don't be blown about by all the hot air and zeal. These preachers prey on folks who fear God and have been ignorantly convinced that their pastor must be right. Many cannot read well and trust godly men to lead them.

**2. Do not let anyone rob you.** Do not allow anyone to rob you of your priesthood in Christ. When Christ said "All authority is given unto me...go ye...," He gave that authority to you, not to a church, thank God. You are not bound to the opinions of any man or group of men claiming special authority from God. When the Mormon comes to your door he needs to see that you have the *authority issue* settled in your mind. Eventually, he will ask you what your *authority* is. Hopefully, you will be able to give a clear answer. No pastor, no church, no group of elders claiming special authority from God should ever be allowed to rob you.

**3. Do not rob Jesus Christ of his headship in the Church.** He did not leave town. Only His body left. Luke tells us that the book of Acts is a record of the things which Jesus *began* to do, and He is still doing them. He has not delegated His authority to any group of men anywhere. He did not retire when He went to heaven.

**4. Do not forget who you are.** Your whole spiritual stability in this Christian walk comes from who you are in Christ; your position in the body of Christ. It is not the result of your position in some local assembly, however wonderful it may be. Your position in His body gives you full access to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If, some day, something goes wrong between you and your pastor and you do end up leaving your church, (perish the thought) you are just as secure in Christ. The pastor does not hold any keys to your soul's welfare in his hands. Jesus Christ does and He speaks through his Spirit. You are accountable to Him. The thought that a pastor could eject you from the body of Christ by removing you from a local church is unthinkable.

**5. Do not let others rob this Bible of its authority.** That is what this whole discussion boils down to. Does a *church* have authority over you or this book? If your soul is in the hands of a man led church, you are in very deep trouble. This book is the final authority. The Charismatics seem to say their emotions are the final authority. Seeker sensitive movement seems to say results are the final authority. Catholics say the Church is the final authority. Some Baptists say the pastor is the final authority. God says *this book* is the final authority.

The first issue is not "Am I in the Right Church?" The issue is "Am I Right with Christ?"



## What Is the Church? - II

**Intro:** In our last study we focused on 2 Corinthians 1:1:

*2Co 1:1 ¶ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy [our] brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia: (AV)*

Specifically, we were looking at the words "unto the church of God". We used the occasion to talk about the PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH, THE PROPERTIES OF THE CHURCH, and the PRINCIPLES OF THE CHURCH.

As we discussed the PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH we explained that, while the term *church* may be used in a general sense, it is very clear that Jesus Christ was about to establish a unique church, separate from anything which had gone on before and, as we will see later, separate from anything which will go on after her departure. Very few dispute the presence of the church. The real question is what is her essence? What is her purpose? When did she actually begin and when will her task be completed?

A. While discussing the PROPERTIES OF THE CHURCH we explained that there were two world views concerning church and churches.

(1.) There are those, such as ourselves, who believe that there is one positional church. This is a universal church which is made up of all believers everywhere who have been placed in the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. We further hold that all such believers are obligated to be participants in local churches.

(2.) A second group of folks teach the doctrine of human succession. These folks say Christ ordained and established an *earthly* church while He was here on earth and that the rights to administer and propagate that church belong only to the select few who can trace their conversion through it. Roman Catholics, Mormons, Churches of Christ, and a great many Independent Baptists hold such doctrines. While their doctrines all vary wildly, they all claim that they are the true church and that all others are alien.

B. We then introduced you to some Principles.

(1.) First, we wanted you to know that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who places us into His Church through the agency of the Holy Spirit, *not* through the right of water baptism. We used 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, and Romans 6 to clarify this important point.

(2.) Secondly, we showed you that the Great Commission was given to *all* men. That is *all* believers are commanded to teach *all* new converts to obey *all* things whatsoever Christ has commanded us. The so called Great Commission was a universal command given to all believers, not just to the disciples who were present at that time. None of them lived unto the end of the age. This command is still valid.

So, you see, for you thinkers, what we are really saying is this. The doctrine of succession *does* exist. It is Jesus Christ Himself who places new members into His church through the agency of the Holy Spirit who baptizes us into Christ. There is no divinely ordained earthly church, not Catholic, not Mormon, not Churches of Christ, not Baptist.

Thank you for your patience in reviewing these things. I want you to know enough about these issues so that you will not be intimidated by folks who think they are more biblical than you are. I do not want to see anyone rob you of your priesthood in Christ. I do not want to see anyone rob Jesus Christ of His proper headship of the church. And, importantly, I want you to see that your spiritual walk and stability come from who you are in Christ, not from your membership in a local church, for from the approval of your pastor.

It is time to add two more issues. We have seen:

**THE PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH** - she does exist. The gates of Hades will not prevail against her.

**THE PROPERTIES OF THE CHURCH** - There is *one* positional church, made up of all who are *in Christ*. Local assemblies should mirror this church.

**THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CHURCH** - It is Christ, through the Holy Spirit who places us in it - not water baptism. Therefore human succession does not exist.

We will now add the **PRIORITY OF THE CHURCH** and the **PERIMETERS OF THE CHURCH**.

#### **IV. The Priority of the Church**

For a change of pace we're going to cover this point using the metaphor of a map.

On a recent trip we covered significant portions of Nevada, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, Alberta, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California. There were times when we looked at the *national* map. There were times when we chose to use one large *regional* map which covered all of the states and provinces we were in so that we could monitor the big picture. There were times, however, when we needed to see the extra detail which could only be provided through *local* area maps. There were even times when we had to look at the map *inset* to get the detail we needed.

When Christians talk about the *priority of the church*, they usually only use their *local* maps. They go quickly to Matthew 28:19-20, where they read those words we just studied:

*Mt 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen. (AV)*

Every word of the Great Commission is true. And it certainly *does* speak of our great priority, the *only* priority of the Church. Your road map is, indeed, correct. The problem is, one is only looking at the *local* map when he looks at the Great Commission. He also needs the *Regional* and even the *National* map in order to get the big picture about the church and her *priority*. Let me explain by trying to draw a map for you. It's kind of a 3-d map.

1. To begin, let's draw a few clouds at the top of our blank sheet of paper. These clouds are to remind us of eternity. It is enough for us simply to understand that eternity transcends time.
2. Secondly, let's draw the horizon. On the left we will mark the beginning of the human race, and on the right, the end of time.
3. Thirdly, we will mark the most important milestone on our roadmap, the *Cross of Christ*. The death and resurrection of Christ is the most important event in the history of the world.
4. Now, it is time to place some roads on our map. We will see *unimproved roads*, *improved roads*, and roads yet *under construction*.
5. There were actually two roads which led away from Adam and his family. One road was traveled by the godly line of Seth. One was traveled by the ungodly line of Cain. These roads wound around some interesting landmarks and came together at the flood where there was a wash out. After the flood, the descendents of Noah were soon disseminated at Babel and, we might say that a number of unimproved roads began to appear on the road map of man's long history. But, before long God called out a man named Abram.
6. While Abram had many descendents we see that God focused His attention on one road in particular, the Jewish highway, and this truly was a superhighway. We shall call this an improved road because this is where God placed His primary focus. The rest of the Gentiles will travel on unimproved highways.
7. As we travel the Jewish highway we approach the mountains and the valleys of the prophets. They were mountains in that they told of the glories of God and His still future dealings with these people. They were mostly valleys, however, as they warned of the impending chastisement and captivity of this people and her beloved city.
8. It is while we are traveling this highway of the prophets that we find some very interesting *road signs*. They spoke of a road yet under construction, of mountains and hills which would be brought low, and valleys which would be raised up. All of this construction would be for one who would come in the name of the Lord. In our terms, they spoke of a coming Christ.
9. Now, these road signs were of great interest to God's people even though they were almost contradictory at times. It was as though they spoke of two Christs, or Messiahs. On the one hand, they spoke of His suffering and of a day when He would be cut off. On the other hand, they spoke of a day when He would bring justice into all the earth and reign as Israel's great and perfect King. Now, please remember, these road signs did not only speak of Christ, they spoke of the future of both Jews and the nations, and they spoke in great detail.
10. Then we come upon that great milestone of history, the coming of Jesus, the Christ, Jesus, the Messiah. But which Messiah would He be, the one who suffers, or the one who reigns? It did not seem that He could be both because the suffering Messiah had to die in order to fulfill his commission. One cannot rule the world if He is dead. The problem existed because the key had not yet been understood. The key which unlocked the puzzle was the resurrection of Messiah. Oh, there were road signs pointing to this coming resurrection on the Old Testament highway, but

we were traveling so fast we missed them. Remember, now, the resurrection is the key to resolving the conflict in the two roles of Messiah, the suffering Servant and the reigning King.

11. But there is more. Even though the resurrection of Christ has already occurred, our highway has taken a strange turn. The suffering Messiah has been exalted in *God's* eyes, but He is not yet reigning on earth as the early road signs announced He would. He does not yet rule Israel. Why is this so? It is because Messiah has *two* great tasks. One is to be a light to the nations. This reaching out to the nations appears to be the special task of the suffering Messiah. Secondly, He brings justice in all the earth. This, He will do especially in the context of restoring David's throne. He must first be a light to the nations before bringing justice to the earth (Isaiah 49:6).

Look again at the roadmap. Notice how the highways suddenly change. The Jewish road is closed. The construction barricade stands in front of it. The Gentile road now becomes the paved road. In fact, we read the words of Paul:

*1Co 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (AV)*

Jew and Gentile baptized into the same body of Christ.

12. Some would have us think at this point that these two roads have merged and will remain that way until we get to our destination. This is not the case. How do we know that it is not the case? We know because of all those signs we read when we were back on the highway of the prophets. Those promises have not yet been fulfilled. The Jewish road which is closed will be opened once again.

13. When will the road be opened? It will be opened at the other end of the valley when the Messiah returns to complete His task, this time, of course, to bring justice in all the earth. This time He will return to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

We have taken this trip for a reason. If you do not see the big map you will make all kinds of mistakes. If you do not read the big map you will not understand the church, or her priority. If you do not understand the priority of the church you will never be able to see how God wants you to behave in this life. You will not see what your real goal and passion should be.

Here is the secret. Here is the *legend* which you need in order to properly read the map. We see the big picture in Colossians 1:24:

*Col 1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; [Even] the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what [is] the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: (AV)*

Do not skip over those verses as if they are just so many words! Do not look at those Jews as if they were so many simpletons because they missed all those road signs! The church is missing *her* road signs as well. Paul is talking about suffering in this passage. We will expand this matter of suffering in our next study.

Paul says that suffering is for a purpose! He says it an essential part of the *mystery*. We have the option of *making up* the sufferings of Messiah. How can we do this? Paul says we can share in the sufferings of the Messiah because the Messiah is in us!

This is what it means to be *in Christ*. It means to be in the Messiah! It means that we take up His role and His purpose. We are the suffering servants. We suffer now and we reign later.

That is what this *body of Christ* teaching is all about. We are in the body of *the* Christ, the Messiah.

What, then, is our priority? Our priority is to reach the *nations*. No wonder Jesus said to go into all the world, teaching all nations. This is the present task of Messiah.

But, you say, "I know all that. What is your purpose for bringing it up? What is your thrust?" Look at this last point. We are talking about the church. We have seen her priority. In a Word, she carries on the work of the resurrected Christ. She is one with the suffering Christ who is rescuing the nations. Now, look at:

## V. Her Perimeters

### A. There are many folks who differ about when the church began:

- Some Baptists say it began with John the Baptist. (Some Baptists.)
- Some say it began in the Old Testament or with Christ's ministry on earth. (Some Reformed)
- Some say it began at Pentecost. (Typical Dispensationalists.)
- Some say it did not begin until the end of the book of Acts. (Hyper Dispensationalists.)

I believe that the church began *salvifically* (in terms of our atonement) the day we were placed in *the* Christ, the day the Holy Spirit was used by Christ to place us into Himself (Luke 3:16, 1 Corinthians 12:12,13). The church began her in-Christ ministry, representing His absent body at Pentecost. Pentecost marked the first day the church was anointed to carry out her New Covenant *ministry*. At that time God confirmed outwardly what had already occurred at the cross. The outward manifestations of Pentecost were evidence that the inward baptism of the Holy Spirit had occurred. This outward manifestation was a strong argument to both the apostles and the Jews that a new kind of ministry had been put in place, a New Covenant ministry. The days of the Old Covenant, the law, were over. Later, those outward manifestations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit ceased. It was no longer necessary to show the New Covenant had been put in place.

### B. There are many folks who differ about when the church will *conclude* its task:

- Some say it will be concluded when we have won the last soul to Christ. (Some Post Millennialists.)
- Some say it will be concluded at the end of the tribulation period. (Post Tribulation Rapturists.)
- Some say it will be concluded after the tribulation but before the day of wrath. (Pre Wrath Rapturists)

- Some say it will be concluded before the tribulation and the day of the Lord. (Pre Tribulation Rapturists)

I believe that our special role will be completed when Messiah takes matters in hand in His own *physical* body, once again. The *spiritual* body of Christ will have completed its task, when Christ initiates His program in His physical body. When the Son of God reaches out and takes that Seven Sealed Scroll, (Revelation 4 & 5) He will initiate the second half of His messianic task, bringing justice into all the earth through Israel. You see, the most interesting thing about the book of Revelation is that the focus is not on us, it is not on the saints, it is on the Lamb.

Christ *personally* takes the scroll from the One on the throne. He *personally* opens those seals. He *personally* drives all the activities of the tribulation, and He *personally* returns with his saints who will be with Him forever from that point on.

When does the church age end? There is only one biblical answer. This age ends when the highways shift once again, when the emphasis returns to the Jewish people and the Jewish program and Messiah personally executes His purpose for them.

Will we still be in Christ? Of course! But our role will change. We will become the observers. We will become participants by our presence, but it will be His Sword and His judgment which will bring in His kingdom.

Now, the question of the moment is this, are we once again at the convergence of these roads? Is there a shift in the wind? Are we about to round the curve and see the flagmen? Is the Gentile highway coming to an end? Is our opportunity to share in the sufferings of the Messiah in gathering the nations over? Is the long day of salvation as we know it drawing to a twilight? Are we watching the road signs?

## Saved to Suffer

Intro: Life is full of paradoxes, anomalies, and ironies, not the least of which is the teaching that Christians should not only endure suffering, but should actually look forward to it and even long for it. Such is the substance of 2 Corinthians, in general and the stuff of this study in chapter one.

We have proceeded to verse 3 where we read a eulogy of sorts. It seems to break not only from the tradition of Greek letter writing, but also even from Paul's personal tradition. Normally when Paul begins a letter, he begins with a brief prayer of thanksgiving for the folks to whom he is writing. We do not find that here, perhaps, because he has already expressed his thanks in 1 Corinthians. Perhaps he omits it for other reasons. In any case, our thanksgiving is directed, instead *to God Himself for God Himself*:

*2Co 1:3 ¶ Blessed [be] God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; (AV)*

This is a eulogy, a prayer of blessing. In Jewish liturgical practice, such eulogies were common. There were some 18 of them in a typical synagogue service, "Blessed be God! Blessed be God!" I do not think we do enough of that. I certainly know that, in my own life, when I become slack in offering up those instantaneous words of praise to our God, I see subtle personality changes taking over. The melancholy mood in my soul would prefer to export its bile onto the tissues of my heart and darken my day. But I have often noticed that even the smallest effort to return some praise to the God of creation, a humble offering of honor and blessing to Him, chases the spirits of gloom from my soul.

This is not to say that we only bless God when it is for our benefit. It is simply to say that we cannot bless God without being benefited.

But that is not the thrust of the moment. That is not the focus of our study. We are on the horns of a dilemma. We are confronting an anomaly and Paul, with this innocent eulogy, is salting our interest. He is foreshadowing, as he so often does, the truth he will soon be discussing. Look once again at that verse:

*2Co 1:3 ¶ Blessed [be] God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; (AV)*

I see tenderness in that verse. I see mercy. I see comfort. I see encouragement. I need to see this. I need to *hear* this. For I have heard that God is a Holy God. I have heard that He is a God of wrath, and I rightly believe it. I have heard that He settles His accounts. I need to hear that He loves *me*. I need to hear that He cares about me.

I need to know this. It is not that I am selfish; it is that I feel so alone I need to know He is here.

As I hear the old story about the loaves and the fishes repeated, there is a small fact which comes to my mind. When the Savior produced all this bread and fish He did not produce *whole* loaves of bread and *whole* fishes and then have the disciples distributed them en masse. He broke the bread into individual pieces. He broke the fishes into individual pieces. That is because the miracle was not for the group. The miracle was for every person *in* the group. When I learn that God is the God of *all* comfort I believe that is what Paul is intimating in part. Not only does He give

all kinds of comfort, He provides comfort of all kinds for each one of us. He is the source of strength in our suffering.

But we have not yet touched upon the irony. We have not addressed the real issue which confronts us. The issue is this. If God loves us so much, why does he not simply remove the suffering? The irony runs even and it is found in this seeming contradiction: It is as though the more one tries to do the will of God, the more one sets His heart on serving Christ, the more one receives pain and suffering, and sorrow in return. It is almost as though God would rebuff us for our obedience! The harder we try, the greater the struggle. It would be simple enough if we could fault God for not relieving us of our suffering, but no! Our charges against Him run far deeper! For when we would serve and obey Him explicitly, it is almost as though he heaps even greater struggle and sorrow and suffering upon us. It just doesn't seem right.

And thus, the irony, there is joy in serving Jesus...or is there? Thankfully, some of the darkness and mist which surrounds this bittersweet discussion of the joy of suffering can be cleared away in the following verses. Later, Paul will return to this subject. But, for the immediate, we confine ourselves to three ideas which we find in these next few verses. In these verses we learn a little about how God uses suffering and how God asserts His purpose and plan for us through affliction.

We have associated three key words with God's plan as it relates to our suffering. The first is:

## **I. Preparation.**

God uses suffering to prepare us to be a blessing and comfort to others. This purpose of God is clearly stated in these next verses:

*2Co 1:4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

This is preparation for comfort. The word comfort is that precious "parakaleo." It is the Bible's special love word for beseeching and encouraging our brethren. Suffering is preparation for our ministry of comfort.

This is elementary, but it bears restatement as all elementary things do. There are two kinds of people who have never been able to be of much comfort to me.

(a) One kind is the person who has never taken the class. How can he help me with my Algebra if he hasn't studied it? My first few years in the ministry were a real struggle. I hadn't sorrowed enough with mourners. I hadn't struggled enough with the issues of life. Yes, I had the Word of God and, thankfully, that fact and my calling from God kept me in the ministry, but I had no experience, no dipper from which to draw on the well of compassion. Later in time the trials and toils of life took their toll on me. In time, I *could* be a consolation to others because I had found that Christ was a consolation to me in my dark hours, in my financial nightmares, and in my nights of waiting for a doctor's nod. Some would qualify a man for ministry with books and tests. I would rather think that the scars we bear in our hearts and on our bodies are the best diplomas of all. If we would *enrich* others we must first be willing to be *impoverished* ourselves. That will always be the way of God.



(b) There is another person who has never served me well in my hour of need. He is the person who *took the class, but never learned the lesson*. Yes, he suffered, but his suffering did him no good. It served him no purpose because he did not learn the lesson of the course. He did not learn humility. He did not learn patience. And, importantly, he did not learn to console others in their hour. Instead, this man self-righteously announces that no matter how difficult your hour of trial is you may be sure that *his* has been more difficult. And, in effect, until you have suffered as he has suffered you are not eligible for comfort. For this man, the old days were always worse. I do not even want him around when my tooth is aching. He is of no help to me. He is no consolation.

What about you? What about me? Have we taken the class? Did we pass the class? Did we flunk with a B for bitterness or an S for self-righteousness? It's better to get the T for tenderness. Have you allowed the sorrows of this life to soften your soul and increase your reach? If so, the purpose of God in suffering has been accomplished! God has used suffering to prepare you!

The first key word then is preparation, preparation for comfort. The second key word is found in verses five through seven:

*2Co 1:5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, [it is] for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, [it is] for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you [is] steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so [shall ye be] also of the consolation. (AV)*

While it may take a minute or two to arrive at it, the key word here is:

## II Participation

Suffering prepares us for participation in *the consolation*. Let's kick a few stones over before we tie the ribbon on this.

(1) First, let's study the biology of this matter.

*For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ*

There is a formula introduced in this verse. Stated as an equation, the greater our suffering, the greater will be our consolation. It is proportional. As suffering abounds, so the consolation abounds. In general, the word *abound* means to exceed measure, to overflow. But the word also carries an image with it. Strongs' notes: "Abounding" is used of a flower going from a bud to full bloom." Suffering is sort of a fertilizer. It is a growth stimulant. Suffering releases the consolation of Christ into our lives. Even a neophyte knows that a plant without any stress at all will fail to thrive.

(2) Secondly, look at the physics of the matter. Paul says:

*And whether we be afflicted, [it is] for your consolation and salvation, [Underline mine.]*

That is an interesting law of physics. There is a dynamic at play. Do you remember those stainless steel balls which you have seen hanging on strings, all in a row? Do you remember pulling the first ball back and letting it drop on the other balls? And you remember how the last ball

on that string, way down there, experiences the consequence of the first strike? This is what Paul says in effect, "I have suffered for *your* benefit. Now, *you* have the opportunity to suffer for the benefit of someone else."

This scenario has been repeating for generations. Everything you are in Christ, you owe to the sufferings of someone else who has gone on before you in Christ.

New Agers have some weird idea in their minds that the more they give back to the universe the more the universe will enrich them! Don't you believe it! All the universe wants to do is eat you and all of the laws of nature are working toward your demise. But, if you would really understand what God is up to, take a look at this wonderful reciprocal privilege. Others suffered for *you*, now *you* may suffer for others that they may, in turn, suffer for still others!

We see this in the natural world. The mother and the father suffer for their children who rarely understand what their parents have gone through in order to give them life and to provide for them. The day comes, when they, in turn, become the new parents who suffer for their children. In all of it - there is great joy released. There is great reward.

(3) There is also a history lesson here:

*2Co 1:7 ¶ And our hope of you [is] stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so [shall ye be] also of the consolation. (AV)*

Where is the history? Believe it or not, it is hiding behind that word consolation.

Scan verses 3-7 and notice that, originally, Paul used the word comfort extensively in verses 3 and 4. He then adds the word consolation. Now, clearly, the words comfort and consolation mean virtually the same thing. They are both in the same family of Greek words. We'll call that family the *parakaleo* family of words. But the words are different and the word consolation connoted a different thought to the Jewish Christian.

This is why we said there was a bit of a history lesson in this. Do you remember the story of Simeon? Do you remember what the Bible says about Him in Luke? The Bible says in Luke 2:25:

*Lu 2:25 ¶ And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name [was] Simeon; and the same man [was] just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. (AV)*

What was Simeon waiting for? He was waiting for the *consolation* of Israel. Literally, he was waiting for *the* consolation. The consolation was associated with the coming person and ministry of Messiah.

The Four Gospels Commentary says:

*"For the consolation of Israel". A common name for the era of the Messiah, which was so called because the advent of the Christ would bring comfort to his people (#Isa 40:1). Jews swore by the consolation of Israel, and the phrase, "May I see the consolation of Israel", was common among them. A prayer for the coming of the Messiah was daily used by them. -TFG*

Now, if you look again at the words in verse 7 of our text you may rest assured that the Jewish Christians in the Corinthian church knew what Paul was saying:

2Co 1:7 ¶ *And our hope of you [is] stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so [shall ye be] also of the consolation. (AV)*

Paul is beginning to make an association which will grow even stronger before we leave the book of 2 Corinthians. It is the association we began to make last week when we spoke of the doctrine of the church.

This *is* the Messianic Age. The Messianic Age is in two divisions, the Mystery phase and the Millennial phase. They are separated by the Day of the Lord. During the Millennial phase the Messiah will reign as King over Israel and over the entire world. He is the reigning King. During the Mystery phase it is the suffering Messiah who is calling out a people for His name from among the nations.

Simeon *knew* this. He asserted his prophecy in Luke 2:29:

*Lu 2:29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. (AV)*

Now, there is a sense in which we are still waiting for the consolation in the Jewish understanding of the Word. The words "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people..." found in Isaiah 40, have not occurred in their truest sense.

*Isa 40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. (AV)*

This pronouncement would have been accomplished if she had accepted her Messiah. But, sadly, Israel would have no part of that comfort. She would not receive the pardon which was abundantly offered unto her. She refused, for the time being, the Messiah.

But there is a *consolation* which has become available through Messiah to those of us who are part of His body, carrying out His work in this age. Take one final look at verse 7:

2Co 1:7 ¶ *And our hope of you [is] stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so [shall ye be] also of the consolation. (AV)*

Do you remember that we said the second key word was *participation*? Participation in the consolation?

Paul wants you to know that *you* are a partaker of the sufferings. It is not just any old suffering but the suffering of Messiah. I am not beating a dead horse when I rehearse this over and over again. I am preaching a live Messiah. The word partakers in this verse is the Greek *koinoneia*. This term carries with it the picture of two oxen struggling together under the same yoke. Such oxen are fellowshiping under a common cause, they are partners.

This partnership belongs only to those who are in the body of Messiah. We are fellowshipers together with Christ. Just as you would never yoke an ox and a donkey together, we must never think of yoking believers with unbelievers together in Messiah's ministry. They are the mission field, not the missionaries!

Most importantly, we are not alone in our suffering for Christ. We are a part of a long line, preceded by a great cloud of witnesses and pressing forward to a grand and glorious day when we will stand with folks of every age, every kindred, every tribe and nation, singing the praises of the Lamb. So, we have consolation in our sorrow. We can truly sing, there is joy in serving Jesus! There is even joy in our suffering, because it is for a grand and glorious cause! Notice the third key word in the passage.

We have seen: Preparation for conflict. We suffer that we may console others. We have seen Participation in the consolation. We are partners in the Messianic plan. Finally, see that suffering produces:

### **III. Protection from Complacency.**

Suffering and hardship stand as our greatest defenses against our greatest enemies- ourselves. Notice verses 8 and 9:

*2Co 1:8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: (AV)*

One lesson we learn in these verses is that leadership and rank in service for Christ does not make us immune to suffering. In earthly military movements, the higher your rank, the lower your risk. Foot soldiers and parachutists suffer before Generals and Admirals. This is not so with God. The evidence that God is advancing a man in His military can usually be seen by the trouble he is facing, by the price he is paying for his service for Christ. That is one lesson.

But there is another lesson which we must all be made to see. The very trials which we face teach us not to trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.

There is so much to be said about this verse which must be left behind. Specifically, note that the true servant of Christ "buys off" on death itself! He says that his hope is not to stay alive; his hope is to trust in the God who raises the dead.

Think on a final thought: Suffering protects us from our complacency. It forces us to trust in the living God.

You have probably heard the old Arab proverb, "All sunshine makes a desert..."

Barclay says "The danger of prosperity is that it encourages a false independence; it makes us think that we are well able to handle life alone. For every one prayer that rises to God in days of prosperity, ten thousand rise in days of adversity."

Abraham Lincoln said: "I have often been driven to my knees in prayer because I had nowhere else to go."

Regretfully, we sometimes do not go to God until there is no other place to go.

What does suffering produce? It produces Preparation for comforting others. It produces Participation or fellowship in the Messianic consolation. It produces Protection from our Complacency. In reality, then, *it really does produce joy*.

It is in suffering with Christ that we find true fulfillment of our purpose, and by it we are made fit to serve in God's great cause. It is where we find our identity, our purpose, and our meaning in the great scheme of things. It is where we find fulfillment and satisfaction and completion.

There is one thing which your suffering cannot do. It cannot bring you salvation. Remember the ox and the donkey. One cannot suffer with Christ and one cannot suffer for Christ until he understands that Christ has suffered for him. He has paid the full price and penalty for his sin and provided a rich and free salvation.

## Partners Do Their Part

Intro: It is time to take a quick overview of the book of 2 Corinthians:

<u>The Chapters</u>	<u>The Emphasis</u>
1-7	Grace in Suffering
8-9	Grace in Giving
10-12	Grace Under Fire - Paul's Apostleship Defended
13	Grace In Warning - The Conclusion

Our last outline brings us to this study. We were beginning to immerse ourselves in the theme of suffering. There we isolated three key words as we sought to understand some of the meaning and *purpose* for suffering. We saw that suffering produces:

- A. Preparation for Comfort vs. 3-4
- B. Partnership in the Consolation, vs. 5-7, and
- C. Protection from our own Complacency, vs. 9-11.

Our present goal is to *expand* briefly on the theme of partnership in suffering as we focus in a little more closely on verses 9-14. In the last chapter we were stressing *the Purpose of suffering, why God allows it*. That is why the above outline made sense. God prepares us to comfort others, makes us partners in Messiah's consolation, and protects us from trusting in ourselves.

This time we want to stress the Participants in Suffering. We want to talk about our respective roles. In our last session we talked about the *principles* involved in suffering, this time we are talking about *each* of the *partners* in God's plan. We have established that there *is* a partnership in God's plan. In the passage we have before us we have a threefold cord of sorts, because three parties are clearly defined as Paul discusses the suffering process. *God's name* is mentioned over and over. That's one. Paul refers to *himself* over and over. That's two. And the role of the *Corinthians* is mentioned once and again. That's three. For our purposes, we will title our study: Partners Do Their Part, and our three points will be:

- A. God Does His Part
- B. Coworkers Must Do Their Part
- C. The Leader Must Do His Part

Let's begin with the encouraging news:

### I. God Does His Part

This is really where we left off. In verse 9 Paul tells us about the crisis he was in:

*2Co 1:9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: (AV)*

In this suffering - the severity of which brought Paul virtually to the door of death, Paul learned that He had a great Deliverer. God does His part. Paul is quick to acknowledge, that this suffering taught him not to trust himself, but to trust in the living God, as he notes in verse 10:

*2Co 1:10 Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver [us]; (AV)*

Consider a few of the things we learn about God from this simple verse.

### **A. God is a great Deliverer!**

You don't know when the next time will be when you need this truth, but you want to be prepared with it when you do need it. Our God is a great deliverer!

There is a paradox from our point of view. It is a paradox we have observed from the very beginning of God's dealings with man. On the one hand, this great God of ours would train and arm us for battle. He enlists, equips, trains, and sends his soldiers into the heat of the fray. Then, just as we get to the front lines he says to us, in effect, "*Now stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord! Watch ME defeat the enemy!*"

And, it is not enough that we watched Israel learn this lesson with Israel at the Red Sea. the concept is seen again in Joshua's conquests, and with Gideon. In the words of the prophet who commanded Israel in Jehosephat's day:

*2Ch 20:17 Ye shall not [need] to fight in this [battle]: set yourselves, stand ye [still], and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD [will be] with you. (AV)*

Ye shall not need to fight in this battle. The LORD of hosts, the LORD mighty in battle! He is with you.

If we would understand this God whom we serve we must understand that He is a God of war, a great deliverer, and the great defender of our souls. He does battle on behalf of His own.

Deliverance comes at a price. This God will not share His glory with us. Because it is in our natures not to ask directions at the gas station, because it is in our natures to make it on our own, and because we see ourselves as self made warriors, we sometimes rush off headlong into battle without our Champion. And then, when we sustain our casualties because we have run ahead of our Commander, we fall back and with great tears and mourning, crying out, would to God we were back in Egypt! Where is our Deliverer? Why wasn't He there when we needed Him? And the answer is, He is *always* there when we need Him, but He may also stay His hand when we do not think we need Him.

### **B. This Great Deliverer is always on duty.**

*2Co 1:10 Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver [us]; (AV)*

Who delivered us - that's the past... And doth deliver - that's the present... In whom we trust that he will deliver [us] - that's the future.

He does not weary of his role as deliverer. He is as active in delivering us today as he was in Paul's day. No one has been deprived of the deliverance of God and no one needs despair of either His ability or His will.

"A Mighty Fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.  
Our helper He, amidst the flood of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe.  
His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate.  
On earth is not his equal."

That great enemy of our souls does have an opponent, our mighty God.

Some folks love to speculate about verses 9 and 10 and wonder what the nature of Paul's suffering was. What incident was it to which Paul referred? Was it his encounter with the beasts at Ephesus? I do not think Paul wanted us to think in those terms. I do not think Paul wanted us to think in terms of just one area of struggle or human conflict. We have a God who will deliver us from all our mortal woes, wherever that enemy raises his ugly head.

I end this point by reminding ourselves that it is not in our natures to seek deliverance. We prefer to muddle our way through life. We prefer to solve our problems on our own, to tie our own shoes, so to speak. After all, self confidence is a virtue, not a flaw. This is never more obvious in the nature of man than in the matter of the soul's salvation. In this area, more than any other, God wants you to know there is nothing you can do to help yourself. You cannot deliver yourself.

The very word *salvation*, as it is found in your Bible, has its roots in the idea of deliverance. From Genesis to Revelation, in both the Hebrew and the Greek, the word salvation simply means deliverance. And, when God saves a man He saves him from his past, He saves him in the present, and He will save him throughout all the future. He delivers a man from his sin and from himself and from the onslaughts of the evil one. Our God is a great God. He is a great deliverer.

So we have learned that God Does His Part. Now, see that:

## II. Coworkers Must Do Their Part

We have learned the one side of the paradox, that our God is a great deliverer who wants us to know, in the final analysis that it is He, not ourselves who wins the victory. But we must examine the other side of the paradox as well. For reasons beyond our understanding, God has made each of us who know Christ a partaker or a partner in His plan. Paul addresses this in verse 11:

*2Co 1:11 Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift [bestowed] upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf. (AV)*

The first two words, *ye also*, catch our attention.

We saw this in verse 7: As *partakers of the of the suffering*, the Corinthians were *also* partakers of the consolation. We see it in verse 11: "*Ye also, helping together by prayer.*" And we will see it in verse 14: "*As also ye have acknowledged us.*" These Corinthians rejoiced over Paul's ministry and Paul says that they *also* would be a part of his own joy in the day of the Lord.



But it is the special emphasis of verse 11 on prayer which we underscore. This coworker *bears the great burden of prayer* in the here and now, prayer for the work of God and prayer for the servant of God. So much for the old statement "I wish I could help in some way, but the only thing I can do is pray." Paul says, when you pray you are helping together. The construction of this verse is very curious and really challenges the imagination when one looks at the Greek.

It is my personal conviction that Paul is speaking in a poetic and symbolic fashion to these people, picturing them as praying from God's perspective viewing down at upturned faces. And he is telling them that their many upturned faces in prayer on behalf of Paul has been the cause of much praise and rejoicing for the gift of deliverance which Paul was receiving.

The point is that *prayer* on the part of the saint is effectual in empowering the leader, the servant of Christ, wherever he is. Dr. Ironside was so truthful and honest when he noted in his own book words which describe my experience as much as his. Ironside said:

My heart always rejoices when anyone writes or says to me, "I am praying for you." for I need to be prayed for. I am so forgetful about prayer myself; so many times when I should be praying I am busy at something else, and often if there is any power at all in my messages I know it is because somebody at home or in the audience is praying for me. One owes so much to the prayers of God's beloved people....

God has not yet removed the veil. The world has yet to see all that has been wrought by prayer. The world has yet to see all that could have been wrought through prayer.

That is what a leader may expect from his people. He may expect aggressive prayer support. That is what God expects. There have been many occasions on the rough road of life when I have looked into the glaring critical eyes of another saint and my immediate thought has been, "Oh well, I know that this dear sister isn't praying for me." For if she were, there would be a tenderness there, even in our disagreements! There have also been many occasions when, at the end of a Sunday I have known that God has worked in an unusual way and that many participated in that message, not just the one who stood up front. It is a great comfort!

Helping together by prayer. While it does not sum up all of your duties, it sums up the key duty of the saint, to hold the leader up in prayer, to lift up those holy hands, and with Aaron, keep the arms of Moses in the air.

### **I. God Does His Part**

### **II. Coworkers Must Do Their Part**

Now, let's glue the third leg into the three-legged stool of partnership in ministry:

### **III. The Leader Must Do His Part**

*2Co 1:12,13 ¶ For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward. For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end;*

Now, you need to read this. You need to understand this. You need to know this. These are the rights which every congregation has. These are the legitimate expectations of every church member. What are the legitimate expectations?

- You have the right to expect a ministry which is in simplicity and godly sincerity.
- You have a right to expect that you will be instructed not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God.
- You have a right to expect that your pastor's testimony in the world and in the church is consistent with this ministry.
- You have the right to expect, according to verse 13, that his ministry is consistent and unified. That is, that he holds the same positions which the congregation holds. He doesn't just teach them.

So boil those statements down to simple words. You should expect a testimony and a conscience which affirms: *simplicity, sincerity, wisdom of grace, and consistency.*

When we talk about simplicity it is good to understand that Paul is not saying that his ministry was childish or simplistic. The word which you find translated *simplicity* here is also translated as singleness in Ephesians. 6:5

*Eph 6:5 Servants, be obedient to them that are [your] masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; (AV)*

It is the picture of a man's personality and ministry style. Strong's says: it is "not self seeking, openness of heart manifesting itself by generosity" It carries with it the idea of liberality and openness.

*Sincerity* connotes purity and cleanliness of motive. A leader is not to be self seeking with a personal agenda. What you see is what you should get. For example, a young man should not accept a church as a stepping stone in his career move. He not should accept a position as a servant of Christ and then drop it six weeks later because a better opportunity came along.

Paul isn't claiming perfection here. Paul isn't even assuming that everyone at Corinth has confidence in him. According to verse 14 he knows that only part of his congregation acknowledges these traits. Paul is not comparing himself with others, but Paul is commending himself unto them. There are no games here, no false humility, just simple honesty. This simple resumé would serve all men of God well.

The point is that we are all in this together. The Lord Jesus Christ is in this, the leader is in this, and so is the coworker. The goal is our common and mutual rejoicing in Christ. And, the hope of our rejoicing, according to the last words of verse 14:

*2Co 1:14 As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

"In the day of the Lord Jesus..." In that day, the secrets of all our hearts will be made known. There is a sadness which we all sense as we see Paul beginning the process of defending himself,

something he will do more of later in the book. There is a sadness which we sense when we realize that Paul did not have the entire support of this congregation. But, there is a courage which we take from it. Here is an example of a man who deals with criticism pointed directly at himself. We love his honesty and his willingness to grapple with the issues and to answer his accusers. And we love his humility and meekness. We love him. Paul was a man who took Christ's work seriously, but he did not take himself so seriously that he was threatened or unnecessarily defensive. He was able to live with division while he sought unity.

And, what are we to learn from all of this?

With respect to our leaders, let's forget the dramatics and avoid the extremes. Do away with those extreme expectations for our pastors and leaders which would tempt them to be less than honest and hypocritical. On the other hand, we must make it clear that we not only expect, we demand, an honest, forthright ministry which focuses on the wisdom of God and not man.

With respect to ourselves as Co-laborers, let's remember we get what we pray for.

With respect to God, let's remember that He prides Himself in being a deliverer. He was in the past. He is in the present. He will be in the future.

For the believer, He will deliver us *from* our suffering. He will deliver us *in* our suffering. For the person yet to know Christ as Savior, He will deliver him from his sin and from an eternity without Christ. He will deliver him from experiencing the judgment of God in a living Hell.

We have a mighty fortress, a bulwark, a Savior!

## The Importance of Integrity

**Intro:** I suppose that if you were to walk up to me and announce to me that I am ugly you would be quite surprised with my response. I don't particularly care if you think I am ugly. In fact, I rather enjoy the fact that the more one thinks I am ugly the more he must suffer the consequence of having to look upon my face, something I only have to do momentarily in a mirror. If, on the other hand, you walked up to me and called me a liar, or you charged that I do not keep my word, or you alluded that I was unstable in my ministry, you would get quite another response from me.

Why would I be so quick to respond to the charge of lying, breaking my word, or instability in ministry? Why would I pursue those charges while letting a myriad of others go unanswered? Is it because of my pride? Is it a macho thing in men? Is it a "man thing" not to allow his character to go unchallenged? Perhaps it is with some, but it is not with me. Rather, the reason I would be so quick to respond to such charges is because, left unanswered, they harm the ministry. They would certainly harm my ministry; they would harm the testimony of Christ and even, to some extent, impugn the integrity of God the Father. That is the stuff of today's study. That is the argument of Paul as it is about to unfold, beginning with verse 15.

Paul has something important on his mind - and he is going to work it in right at the beginning of this letter. He makes a very clever and wise transition, beginning in verse 14 where he leads up to his opening volley. He says:

*2Co 1:14 As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also [are] ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.,*

Then, he transitions:

*"and in this confidence I was minded to come unto you..."*

As usual, under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit of God, the personality trait of Paul shines through. He is going to address a problem, a charge which has been made concerning his own integrity. Before he does so he *affirms* his readers.

The presenting issue has to do with Paul's plans and the problems associated with planning, but the issue runs much deeper. Our outline will look like this:

- I. WHAT The Plan Was
- II. HOW This Plan Was Made
- III. WHY Plans Must Be Made with Integrity and Reliability
- IV. WHY Paul Chose to Change His Plans

### I. *What* the Plan Was

I cannot speak with great authority, but we can report what is generally assumed by the reading of verses 15 and 16:

*2Co 1:15 ¶ And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea. (AV)*

It is commonly understood that Paul had promised (in the last chapter of 1 Corinthians) to visit these believers and that he had simply not gotten there. Another possibility is that while he had originally planned to come by twice, going to and coming from Macedonia, he was not going to do that. We would deduce this by simply reading verses 14 and 15, and then taking verse 23 as the announcement that his plans had changed.

We cannot speak to the exact details, but this we know, plans had been made by Paul and announced by Paul, and these plans had somehow changed so that Paul would not be able to keep his promise as he had originally stated. In the opinion of many, it is very likely that the charges made against him were very nasty and may even be recorded for us in 2 Corinthians 10:10.

*2Co 10:10 For [his] letters, say they, [are] weighty and powerful; but [his] bodily presence [is] weak, and [his] speech contemptible. (AV)*

In other words, "Paul talks big in his letters, but he is afraid to come personally because he knows that his very presence and speech are weak and contemptible." That, of course, is a false accusation which preachers have believed ever since. We have all been made to believe that Paul was weak, ugly, and impeded in speech.

But, what is the point? What is the problem? Plans *were* made, plans were changed, and the enemy had used this occasion to impugn the integrity of Paul and his team.

**1. First, Paul *is* going to defend himself.** It is not only right and proper for him to do so, in fact, it is absolutely necessary for him to do so. But, secondly:

**2. Paul is going to take advantage of this situation and use it for a higher purpose.** He is going to use it to his advantage, or God's advantage. Instead of whining and crying in the pulpit about how badly he has been hurt, instead of focusing on his own hurt, he decides to use this occasion to teach us about God.

Have you ever met folks who had one track minds? You dread being with them because you know that, eventually, every conversation is going to lead in the direction of their personal obsession? Well, our beloved Paul was such a character, but he had a worthy obsession. He is going to turn this situation around for God's glory. He is going to defend himself by extolling the glories and greatness of God! Let's watch him do it.

In effect, Paul says, OK, let's talk about plans and planning. He does so in verse 17, which we will use for our second point of the study.

## **II. How The Plan Was Made**

*2Co 1:17 When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay? (AV)*

This, of course, a rhetorical question where, according to the grammar of the passage, the answer is already assumed, and the answer is emphatically, No!

**A. Godly plans are to be made with sobriety, not lightness:** "When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness?" The word *lightness* means levity or fickleness of mind.

While sitting in the barber chair I overheard a lady speaking about another person, and her words were: "The problem with him is that he has too many plans and not enough action!" They have plans for this and plans for that and they are going to remodel their house or build a new one and they are going to start this business or tear out that wall, and the list goes on and on, but they plan with *lightness*.

To many, planning is a frivolous thing. They tell you to come by their home at 8 PM and they show up at 9 PM. The list goes on ad infinitum. Christian friend, that is not a characteristic becoming of Christians.

**B. Godly plans are to be spiritual, not fleshly.** Notice Paul continuing the question: "...or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh...?" There are a large number of believers who are rather sanctimonious in their contention that all planning is fleshly and that Christians should not make plans, but rather trust in God. They are out of touch with their Bibles and they are certainly out of touch with their God, who is a master planner, and they are out of touch with Paul who was an incurable planner. *The problem is not that planning is fleshly, the problem is with fleshly plans.* When is a plan fleshly? It is fleshly when it is for the glory and pleasure of man rather than for the glory and pleasure of God. Godly planning is to be made with sobriety, not lightness, and it is to be spiritual, not fleshly.

While talking about planning, however, we offer another caveat. Pastors can easily shift their ministry from a biblically driven ministry to an organizationally driven ministry. Ministry plans should be made to accommodate an authoritative and pervasive ministry of the Word of God. Plans and programs should never dilute this critical focus.

**C. Godly plans are made with certainty, not with caprice and irresolution.** God does not like flippancy and vacillation because these matters relate to truth and truthfulness. Truth is vitally important to God. One who changes his plans in an offhanded manner loses his believability.

We tease unsaved lawyers and doctors because of their ability to get into our pockets and overcharge us for their services. Nor do we envision the non Christian automobile dealers of America as being in line for any citations for honesty and integrity. In all *truthfulness*, however, we would have to acknowledge that this loss of integrity has permeated all of our professions and occupations. These things are not to be true of Christians, and Paul is about to explain *why* as we look at the next verses.

### III. *Why Plans Must Be Made with Integrity, and Reliability*

#### A. The Testimony of *God* is True and Reliable

Verse 18 is actually an *oath*:

2Co 1:18 But [as] God [is] true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. (AV)

Paul and his team wanted these Corinthians to know that their own truthfulness was to reflect the truthfulness of the God whom they represented. This was important to Paul. He was stating categorically that he had not been telling the Corinthians one thing, all the while planning to do another.

Just like any other pastor, I have had many cruel things said about my ministry over the years and most of it ran off like the proverbial water on the duck's back. But the most difficult thing I have had to get over has been the accusation that while I was *saying* one thing, I was *planning* to do another. In fact, I was accused of that on two separate occasions when I participated in the planting of two separate churches. In both cases there were folks who insisted that I had told them one thing (that I would not start a church) even while I was planning to do another. I want you to know that I react as strongly to them as Paul did here, and for the same reason. It is not because these folks meant any harm. I do not think they did. Nor, did I feel the need to defend myself. But rather, it is because the stories they have spread have hindered my testimony and in so doing they have greatly hindered the work of the Lord. This is the reason why Paul is showing such concern. He does not want Christ's work hindered. When you impugn the integrity of the worker and his team you impugn the integrity of God and His Son.

In verse 18, we saw that the testimony of God is true. We expand the discussion in verse 19.

2Co 1:19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, [even] by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. (AV)

## B. Testimony of the Son of God is True and Reliable

The message of Jesus Christ did not vacillate. The word of His servants must not vacillate either. Verse 20 summarizes it in a unique way:

2Co 1:20 For all the promises of God in him [are] yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. (AV)

All of the promises of God in Christ are yes, not yes and no. There are no ambivalent, no unreliable, no vacillating promises which can be found anywhere in God's Word. You can take every one of them to the bank.

And just how sure can we be of these promises of God? Paul sets up four examples of the absolute surety of God's word in his dealings with us.

We will isolate these key words in verses 21 and 22:

2Co 1:21 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, [is] God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. (AV) [Underline mine]

**1. The surety of God's Word is seen *establishing* us.** That is a *legal* word which was used in the guaranteeing of a commitment. When you became a new creation in Christ, you came with a *guarantee*. God absolutely gives His Word that what He begins in you He *will* finish. "*Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it!*" That is quite a guarantee.

**2. The surety of God's Word is seen in that He has *anointed* us.** Anointing was the rite of commissioning. The subject of anointing deserves extended treatment, but for now, understand that God has not only called you, He has commissioned you to a task in His military.

**3. The surety of God's Word is seen in that He has also *sealed* us.** Seals were used to protect the contents of a document. They were a testimony to the authenticity of the contents. Ephesians 4:30 admonishes:

*Eph 4:30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*  
(AV)

You are a living epistle and a letter en route. You are signed and sealed, but not yet delivered. You will be delivered on the day of redemption, and the mail will go through. God's guarantee of His commitment to you came through the sealing of His Holy Spirit who is committed with you all the way. Finally,

**4. The surety of God's Word is seen in that He has given us an Earnest.**

*Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*

Proof positive that God is committed to us is the presence and working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is the down payment, the deposit, so to speak, on the finished purchase or redemption.

Once again, what is the gist of all this? What is the point which Paul is making? God is a God of His Word. He makes a plan and then He follows through on every detail of that plan. There is no variableness, neither shadow of turning with Him. Therefore His *servants* can afford to set no less an example if they would represent Him. So, that brings us to the final question:

If Paul is such a careful planner who plans soberly, not lightly, and if his planning is spiritual and not fleshly because he wants to reflect the truthfulness and forwardness of God, then:

#### **IV. Why *Did* Paul Change His Plan?**

Was it laziness? Was it irresponsibility? Was it irritation with the Corinthians? Was he just sick of their faces? The answer, of course, is no. In his own words, Paul announces:

*2Co 1:23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.*  
(AV)

Paul says effectively: "I did it for your sake. I swallowed my pride. I stayed away, not because I was afraid of my detractors, but because it was not the appropriate time to come." Had he come earlier and fixed their clocks, the delicate balance leadership would have been slanted and they would have seen too much of Paul the authority, and not enough of Paul the helper. There is a time to assert authority. There is also a time to defer. There is a time to fix clocks. There is a time to let the Holy Spirit work out His plan in the lives of the believer.

So, what have we learned?



We have learned that godly Christians make godly plans.  
We have learned that we have a God who keeps His Word and His promises  
We have learned that when we hurt our testimony we hurt His testimony.  
We have learned a godly leader takes the risk, the risk of being misunderstanding, for the sake of his sheep.

There is a final reminder that can be seen in the phrase we just quoted: *“For all the promises of God in him [are] yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”* God keeps *all* of His promises through Christ.

One of those promises is simply stated: "...him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." And here is another:

*Ac 17:30-31 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by [that] man whom he hath ordained; [whereof] he hath given assurance unto all [men], in that he hath raised him from the dead. (AV)*

God has given us His assurance that He will keep His Word. He will judge the world in righteousness by the Lord Jesus Christ. What evidence has He left that He will fulfill His intention? The evidence is the resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. The fact that God always keeps His word can be the source of your greatest fear or the fountain of your greatest joy. Which side of God's promises are you on?

## Effective Intervention

**Intro:** As we move into today's study of chapter two of 2 Corinthians it will help for you to take one thought and store it carefully in the back of your mind for about two chapters when you will need it again. Paul is in the process of defending his integrity. He has probably been accused of vacillating at best, and of being afraid to face his challengers, at worst. *Instead of just defending himself*, Paul has used this occasion to teach us about planning and truthfulness. Our previous study related to that. We learned that Paul had good reason to change his plans and that it was for the sake of the Corinthians themselves that Paul did this. We must continue down this road for a little longer because Paul has not yet let us out of class. You will need to keep in mind that Paul is not yet finished with the discussion of his integrity. Before long will come back to this general theme of the defense of Paul's integrity, as we will again see Paul use this discussion to introduce another truth. For now, let's get back into the classroom and take a good look at chapter two.

In chapter one Paul used this challenge against his integrity to teach us about character in planning. In chapter two he is going to teach us how to conduct ourselves in times of church crisis, especially when that crisis is over issues of conduct.

In the first study, we will talk about Effective Intervention, the basics of church discipline. In the next study, we will talk about the Earmarks of Emotional Health. We will be talking about how a good leader handles his own emotions in times of crisis.

It's time to focus on Effective Intervention

A few years ago, I would have probably titled this study something like "Dynamics of Discipline." But, I have a bit of a problem with that, and it has to do with the word discipline. In biblical terms, the word discipline is a good, wholesome word which relates to discipleship. But the word has become somewhat of a buzz word, especially regarding its use in churches. It is often equated, for example, with the word excommunication. It carries a note of finality with it, almost a concession of failure. We have failed to correct our brother, so we disown him.

Very often, church discipline does end, inevitably, in failure and in closure. But that is *not* its purpose or intent. Its purpose is healing and restoration. For that reason, I prefer the word intervention. The word intervention is broader in its focus. It implies a process, rather than a single act. The word intervention implies broader involvement because it requires the participation of as many folks as possible in the process. In other words, rather than being simply a dictum handed down by church authorities it is a commitment on the part of the whole family to do what is right, for themselves, and for the offender.

With this in mind, it is our intention to look at the Process of Effective Intervention. In the next chapter we'll look at the Trial and Triumph of Intervention.

### I. The Process of Effective Intervention

As stated, the conceived idea behind church discipline is often the simple impression that it consists of a dictum handed down by higher authorities, aimed at justifiably punishing an offender.

We should not settle for this shallow view which leads to ineffective results. Instead, we want to list the basic ingredients of effective intervention.

## **A. Effective Intervention Requires Loving Confrontation.**

We have a classic example of effective intervention occurring right before our eyes in 2 Corinthians. Based upon our study of 1 Corinthians, we believe we have permission to assume just exactly what has been going on here. We think we understand the background of this chapter. Here is the short of it:

While there were many problems extant in the Corinthian church including party rivalries, carnality, disorderly conduct, and doctrinal abuse, one man had singled himself out as a very special offender. His immoral conduct had occasioned blasphemy by the world because of his fornication. We believe that what Paul has been saying to these believers is that if he had come to them, after learning these things, he would have had to come with a rod. He would have had to scold them for not dealing with this issue.

### **1.) We have a biblical duty to confront the offender.**

Notice the seriousness of this situation in 1 Corinthians 5:9

*1Co 5:9 ¶ I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (AV)*

So, we see this man had already been confronted. Notice that:

**2.) We have a corporate duty to confront the offender.** What interests us throughout this whole discussion is the fact that the Corinthians themselves are expected to participate in this process. Never lose sight of that thought. It is not the duty of the pastor to confront. It is not the duty of the deacons to confront. It is the duty of each of us as individuals to confront. We *all* must participate in every step of the intervention process. We have a duty to confront the erring brother.

Sin is so much like cancer that a whole book could be written on the analogy. The secret of dealing with cancer is early detection. When believers, who sense subtle changes in the body, respond quickly to those changes, very often, the spread of the problem can be stopped. When we stick our proverbial heads in the sand the cancer grows.

**3.) We have a loving duty to confront the offender.** We confront him because our love for him has obligated us to confront him. You may have noticed the word love is underscored this portion of the outline. Effective intervention requires loving confrontation.

Look at these verses in our chapter and count up the emotional words... **verse 1**, heaviness; **verse 2** sorry, glad, sorry; **verse 3**, sorrow, rejoice, joy; **verse 4** affliction, anguish of heart, grieved; **verse 5**, grief, grieved; **verse 8**, confirm your love toward him..

It seems that there are really only two reasons why we ever confront anyone. Either we confront folks because of our love for God and our fellow man, or we confront folks because we love ourselves. The motive on confrontation is critical.

I have seen many brethren confronted, so to speak, biblically, but they have not been confronted lovingly. I know the discipline is going on, not out of love, but out of self centered motives on the part of the pastors and boards involved. Recently, in our town, one pastor disciplined four or five families in his church because they made the mistake of respectfully disagreeing with him! That is not intervention! That is interdiction! That is not confrontation motivated by love for God and our fellow man. That is confrontation motivated by self preservation. If there is *no emotion* involved in this intervention process, it is probably wrongly motivated. This will be addressed again later. Notice the second requirement for effective intervention:

## **B. Effective Intervention Requires Enforced Separation.**

Again, we do not see this in our immediate text because the separation in this case has already occurred. The Corinthians had already been instructed to "put away from among themselves that wicked person."

The first question on our mind is "Why must this be done?" We have already dealt with the answer in 1 Corinthians.

**a. We separate ourselves from the disobedient in order to protect our children and ourselves.** Galatians 5:9 says "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." When we make exceptions we all consider ourselves exceptions to the rule. We do not make exceptions because it is the pastor's child or the deacon's child or the wealthy man's child. We separate from sin. When we do not, it spreads like the aforementioned cancer.

**b. We also separate ourselves to protect other congregations.** In Sacramento, where I preached for many years, it is the same way I assume it is everywhere else. Christian fornicators gravitate to the larger congregations where they can have their cake and eat it too, in a "non-judgmental" atmosphere. The problem is that these believers carry their infection with them, and even greater numbers of folks are infected with their tolerant attitudes toward sin.

**c. We separate ourselves in an effort to intervene in the life of the disobedient.** We do this by *escalating* his problem for him. The goal is to *associate* sorrow and shame with his conduct. If the man cannot see the sorrow his sin will eventually bring we escalate the law of natural consequence by bringing into play the law of logical consequence, so that he will associate the discomfort he is feeling with the sin he is committing.

Shame, properly used, *is* a valid disciplinary tool, though the secular psychologist will often argue otherwise. It is not a pleasant thing to administer shame, but it is fundamental to helping the offender. The test is coming to your congregation. Your resolve in being willing to do this will be tested. The only question is when.

It is better that we shame our brother now, than that he be allowed to go on and experience shame in that great day. The Lord Jesus said in Revelation 3:18

*Re 3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and [that] the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. (AV)*

Muse on these words found in Revelation 16:15

*Re 16:15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed [is] he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. (AV)*

We have said that effective intervention requires loving confrontation and enforced separation. We have asserted that the motive for that enforced separation is to spare the flock from the influence of sin, to spare other congregations from that same influence, and to bring shame to bear on the offender. We want him to taste in advance the future shame his sin will bring upon him if he does not repent.

The presenting question is this, are you ready to be obedient in this matter? Are you ready to do this? When your pastor calls a congregational meeting around a communion table some Sunday evening, and an erring brother is presented for intervention who has already been lovingly confronted, will you stand with the obedient?

This is not where intervention ends. Hopefully, this is where it begins. There are additional steps which must follow. Notice the next requirement. This one *is* found directly in the passage in front of us.

### **C. Effective Intervention Requires Measured Application.**

Notice the wording of Paul in this passage:

*2Co 2:6 Sufficient to such a man [is] this punishment, which [was inflicted] of many. (AV)*

As indicated earlier, we will come back to this passage and approach it from a different angle later. It suffices us to make the point of verse 6. Look at the essential ingredients:

*"Sufficient to such a man..."* The punishment was not to go out without measurement. This is why we should hate the word excommunication. It belongs only in Arminian churches such as the Catholic Church where it is taught that you can damn your own soul. Excommunication implies no hope, no path of return, no restoration. Intervention does not imply these unbiblical concepts.

**1.) First, read it this way: Sufficient to *such a man*...** I believe we are to infer something from that. I believe Paul is saying that this kind of action was appropriate to *this kind* of man. In other words, the discipline was metered and measured to the need of the person involved.

**2.)** But we can also read it this way, Sufficient **to such a man**... In this case, it is the word sufficient which catches our attention. There seems to be a play on words here - one of Paul's favorite attention getters. The Greek word for sufficient is usually translated "many or much" in your Bible. What we may well be reading here is this: *"Many or much is the punishment inflicted of many."*

Please understand this fundamental point; the *power of shaming* comes in the participation of the many. If it is only the pastor and the deacons who do it, the effect of the shaming goes no further.

It is a very popular thing to keep such intervention entirely in the closet and it is also a very common thing for such intervention to fail. The power of shaming comes in numbers.

Furthermore, if it is only our local assembly who shares in this shaming, the effect goes no further. Your church should be no haven for believers under discipline under another assembly, be they your stripe or not, the power of shaming is in the power of numbers. But herein also lies the danger of shaming, many or much is the punishment inflicted of many. It must never be used beyond its intended purpose. It must always be withdrawn when it is accomplished. And this does bring us to the last step in the process of intervention:

#### **D. Effective Intervention Requires Unqualified Restoration.**

There is no such thing as a Christian ex-convict. When repentance is full, when adequate evidence of that repentance has been supplied, forgiveness must be as absolute and as complete as Christ's forgiveness is for us when we repent.

##### **1.) This forgiveness is needed to complete the intervention process.** Look at verses 7 and 8:

*2Co 2:7 So that contrariwise ye [ought] rather to forgive [him], and comfort [him], lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. (AV) 2Co 2:8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm [your] love toward him. (AV)*

It is a sad waste to bring a man to repentance and then lose him because he somehow feels like a second class Christian when he returns to us. True repentance calls for true forgiveness.

Our congregation needs to know that we expect true repentance, not just cessation of the disobedient practice. I have had couples actually come to me and say "OK, We're not living together anymore, now will you marry us?" No real agreement with God about their sin was involved. They just wanted the heat removed. However, when repentance is true and complete, so should restoration.

##### **2.) Forgiveness is not only needed to complete the process, it is required.** Paul makes these Corinthians fully accountable to this last step. He says:

*2Co 2:9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.*

Paul said that their willingness to forgive was proof of their obedience, obedience to Paul and obedience to God. We do not have the luxury of saying, "Well, the church has forgiven him, but I never will".

Paul is so emphatic about the necessity of this final step that he attaches his own name and reputation to it. There must be no mistake.

*2Co 2:10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I [forgive] also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave [it], for your sakes [forgave I it] in the person of Christ; (AV)*

This is the sum of it all. Discipline cannot begin with a pastor and not be carried out by the congregation. Forgiveness cannot be carried out by the congregation and not the pastor. The whole process and power of intervention is that it is a community act. And what happens if we

break down at any stage? At confrontation? At Separation, at Application, at Reparation? The consequences are always the same: Satan gets an advantage over us. Paul notes:

*2Co 2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. (AV)*

There is no time when the body of Christ is more vulnerable than when there is sin in the camp. Be it in the pulpit or the pew, on the deacon board or the keyboard, open wounds lead to infection. I said earlier that sin is like cancer. Intervention, on the other hand, is very much like cancer surgery. If you do not operate, Satan gets an advantage. If you operate and the patient dies, Satan gets the advantage. If you operate and do not close up the wound and bring it to a terminus, Satan gets the advantage.

**The solution is to avoid any surgery at all.** If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. Let us all chasten ourselves so that we do not have to endure the chastening of the Lord. In addition, please remember this, if you are an unsaved friend. You have been looking in on the workings of the family of God.

Just as every home and family has its standards and its order, so too does the family of God. It is in the strength of that discipline, that tough love, and that loving discipline that we rescue one another from the neighborhood in which we live.

If you, on the other hand, are still without Christ you are, effectively, in the neighborhood without a family, without all of the sanctifying effects and riches of a family atmosphere. You may think you are getting off easy, living on the streets, without the disciplining hand of a loving father, but you are alone, without hope, and lost.

We all need to be a part of a church family with its traditions and disciplines. But there is something far more important to consider. Today, at this very hour, the Father has extended an invitation for you to be a part of *His* family. He can extend this invitation because He so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whosoever believes on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. You would be wise to settle this matter of your salvation today!

## The Price and Reward of Intervention

**Intro:** We have been talking about effective intervention, the mechanics and the goal of the intervention process whereby we seek to bring an erring brother back into right fellowship with God. In our previous study we looked at chapter two from a mechanical perspective and we were occupied with intervention with regard to its *process*.

We conclude our study of chapter two today wearing a different set of glasses, stressing *emotional health*, and talking first, about the price of intervention. We will also look briefly at the rewards of intervention.

### I. The Price of Effective Intervention

To coin the words of our Savior, "Ye have surely heard the proverb, Physician heal thyself." Do not give your advice on athlete's foot to me if you still have it. When we deplore the quality of emotional health we are encountering in our pews today, we must start with our pulpits and leadership boards and teachers. If we do not have stable godly men there how can we build them in the pew? If the Sunday School teacher cannot keep her temper, how then can the scholar? This naturally leads to the question, what is the key to strong emotional health? How do we develop it in our pastors and leaders? What is the source of good emotional health?

Our proposition is unique. It is actually a twofold proposition. It is a contention that you will rarely find in counseling guides, so you will want to observe carefully.

The first part of the proposition is this, good emotional health is not a thing to be sought after. It is not a goal to be achieved. It is not to be sought any more than joy or happiness should be sought. Good emotional health is not something that we pursue; it is something that occurs spontaneously.

The second part of the proposition is this, good emotional health is the result of *the application of love under pressure*. Love, properly applied in times of stress, produces the good fruit of emotional stability. Right now, this statement may sound foreign. Hopefully, it will seem reasonable before we finish. Turning, our chapter, then, into a laboratory on emotional health, notice what love under pressure produces.

We are too general in our discussion of love and far too willing to settle for the poetry of 1 Corinthians 13. We are too weak in the pragmatics of love. Step into the laboratory and observe the Apostle Paul. Observe love under pressure.

#### A. Love under Pressure Produces A Confession of Dependence

*2Co 2:1 ¶ But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness. For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me? (AV)*

Consider the world's psychological models. All the Freudian has to offer is guilt, preferably sexual guilt. He tells you that you should never have gotten in the sinking boat. The Rogerian, on the other hand stands at a distance and holds you off, asking you the questions, encouraging you to



interact with yourself. While you are drowning he encourages you to consider reasonable solutions for your problem, but *you* must discover the life preserver on your own.

The Christian, on the other hand, jumps in the water with the sinking swimmer. Notice the wording of Paul in verse 3:

*2Co 2:3 And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is [the joy] of you all. (AV)*

Did you see what Paul is doing in these verses? He is committing the cardinal sin of psychology. He is confessing his *co-dependency* with the victim in the healing process. The co-dependent in psychology often wants, of course, the opposite result. He *needs* the victim's problem in order to authenticate his own worthiness. Paul's co-dependence is of another sort. Paul is saying, if *you* fail, part of me fails! If you drown, part of me drowns! If you make it out of the water, part of me lives with you! My emotions are inextricably linked with your problem. I want you to succeed for *your* sake and for *my* sake, because *your* sake is my sake! Our mutual joy is co-dependent.

Love under pressure produces a confession of healthy co-dependence!

## **B. Love under Pressure Produces Control of Our Own Responses.**

1.) Sometimes there must be a willingness to wait when our natures tell us to act! We saw that in verse 1 where Paul said:

*But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness. (AV)*

There are, regretfully, those among us whose nature is to jump right in with both feet! They do not understand that, for everything there is a time and a season. When an offense or problem occurs, they leave no stone unturned. They have not learned that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent. They have not learned that they are partners with God and the Holy Spirit in the correction process. Love considers first the impact of the rebuke on the person, measures its intensity, and then bides its time for the proper application of the rebuke. It is not hurried. Sometimes, then, there must be a willingness to wait when our natures tell us to act.

**2.) Other times there must be a willingness act when we would rather wait.** For every impetuous soul among us who would jump in too soon, there are two of us who wait too long. Like many of these same Corinthians, we have to be forced to move into action. Love under pressure gives us that motivation we cannot find within ourselves.

As noted earlier, when someone says "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," more likely than not it is expressed by someone who wants to avoid the problem. When we avoid discipline, it shows that we do not care for those in need of the act.

**3.) Other times, there must be a willingness to stop after we have started.** Like these Corinthians who first could not get going in their disciplinary process and then could not stop, we too, must overcome the inertia of staying in motion.

Love under pressure causes us to control our responses so that they are timely and appropriate. Remember that, Dad, in your own disciplinary process in the home. Controlled responses bring satisfying results. Uncontrolled, untimed responses will aggravate and exacerbate the problem.

### **C. Love under Pressure Produces a Commitment of our Own Emotions. Verse 4**

*2Co 2:4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you. (AV)*

Paul says, out of *much* affliction and *anguish of heart* I wrote unto you with *many tears*, not that ye should be grieved but that ye might know the love I have abundantly unto you.

In the early years of my ministry I was more distracted by protagonists than I am now. I would hear them tell how I was not loving enough, not evangelistic enough, not organized enough, not trained enough, not spiritual enough, not pastoral enough, not fruitful enough, and all the rest. In the middle years of my ministry it occurred to me that I had nothing to worry about, for the very ones who were making these accusations were, themselves, the most noisy, but the least productive in my congregations. That is, they themselves were transferring their guilt and their problems and their inward anger on me. And so, I learned to have a little more compassion for them and more patience.

It was not until the more recent years of my ministry that I began focusing differently on the issues. I learned that not one of these protagonists loved me as a person. At the same time there were folks in my ministry who criticized me, suggested corrections, challenged my infinite wisdom and authority on a wide range of issues, and got away with it. They even managed to bring about significant changes in my preaching and administration.

What was the difference between them and the protagonists? They were committing their emotional energies not just to the problem but to me, personally. They got away with it because there was a bond of love between us. They were on my team. They were in my corner. I was in their corner. And, my, such freedom we had to lay the cards on the table! Love under pressure produces a commitment of our own energies (and I might add, resources) to the person and his problem.

### **D. Love under Pressure Produces Courage to Confront**

Now, we look at the coin on the other side. We all fill the roles of both the confronted and the confronter. Love makes us willing to prod. It makes us willing to nudge. It makes us willing come alongside the brother and beseech him. Love produces this courage in us. This is what Paul is doing in verses 8 and 9:

*2Co 2:8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm [your] love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.*

No one (in our culture) likes to prevail on others. We pass around clipboards for sign-ups because it relieves us of the duty of having to ask someone directly if they would help cleaning the church. Personally, I *hate* to ask people to do things.

One time I took upon myself the challenge to consider which man, in all of my former ministries, I considered the most fruitful person. Who was the most fruitful of them all? Who did well with his family? Who was most productive in building up the flock? The answer to each question brought Charlie to mind. It was Charlie, whose own children went into the Lord's work; Charlie, who single handedly built the AWANA ministry in that church; Charlie, who built up the board of that

church. And, to the best of my knowledge, he spent little or no time as a teacher. He knew his doctrine well, but he was not a theologian. Now Charlie was not perfect, but he was fruitful. What was his secret?

Charlie knew how to prod. Charlie had the courage to confront gently. He knew how to quietly, but firmly expect accountability. When he saw a young man attending the morning services, but not the evening service, he would give that man no rest until he started attending evening services. When any of our 16 board members showed up late to a board meeting he reminded them. When he saw a man with a hammer, he found the wood for him to pound on. Charlie could always be found relentlessly prodding others to do more and be better for Christ, in practical ways.

Here is the point. If you are not willing to confront, you must not picture yourself as a loving person. You are just a wimpy noodle, loveable, perhaps, but wimpy. Fear of confrontation must never be disguised as love or tolerance. It is denial at best and a lie at worst. Love, in the pressure cooker of crisis, will have the courage to confront, to prod, and to admonish. Learn this skill and you too, will be fruitful.

Now, please notice,

### **E. Love under Pressure Produces the Consignment of our Own Interests.**

*2Co 2:10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I [forgive] also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave [it], for your sakes [forgave I it] in the person of Christ; (AV) [Underline mine.]*

Whatever is Paul saying? What is he driving at? I believe Paul is saying this. Whatever emotional stake you have in this problem personally, give it up. Forgive it, release it. To whatever extent damage has been done to you (if any has been done) release it. I release it for your sake. I do so in the name or the person of Christ.

Love releases unpaid emotional debts. Love knows that, in the final analysis, there can never be such a thing as perfect reconciliation. Yes, there must always be an effort to arrive at the truth, but very often, the truth can never be discovered. If we wait until all the facts are conceded, and we wait until we get our apology, everything else goes on hold. Have you been offended? Have you been betrayed? Have you sought reconciliation? Have you sought resolution and terminus? Then forgive it. Lest Satan should get advantage of us.

Take a brief look at verses 14-16 and see the end result, the goal and purpose of all this discussion. We shall call it:

## **II. The Triumph of Intervention**

*2Co 2:14 Now thanks [be] unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one [we are] the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who [is] sufficient for these things? (AV)*

There are some technical matters concerning this passage which will have to wait for another study. We conclude with just this one thought. It is God who is to be thanked. God *always* leads us to triumph.

God must be emphasized because He is the crux of this statement. You may not have godly parents. I cannot help that. You may not have a faithful mate. I cannot change that. You may not be happy with your church. I cannot change that. Your employment circumstances may be horrible. I cannot change that. Your neighbors may lay awake at night thinking of ways to taunt you. I cannot change that. The police may have arrested you falsely. I cannot change that.

I can only tell you this. That if all of the above things are true about you at the same time, you can still triumph in Christ. You can still have the victory in a given trial. Personally, I love to quote the little ditty that says, "It's hard to soar like an eagle when you're flying with turkeys!" And it is hard, but it can be done. Young people, you can remain pure while everyone around you in your own youth group defiles himself. Businessman, you can remain honest, while everyone else resorts to cover-ups. And churchman, you can stand tall and true in the worst of church crises, and come out the stronger. What is the secret of this triumph which is ours in Christ?

Victory and maturity comes from the application of love to the circumstances of life. It comes from our mutual confession of our dependence upon one another. It comes from the control of our responses. It comes from committing our own emotional resources to meeting the needs of others. It comes from having the courage to confront and prod your friends. It comes from the consignment of our own interests to the cause of Christ.

Have you ever asked yourself, what really is maturity? What really is emotional stability? What really is patience? What really is a good disposition? What really is meekness?

All of these things are results that come about as believers seek to apply the shoe leather of love to the soles of their lives. These all occur when we decide to make love work. Maturity results when we filter all of our words and actions at home, at work, and at school through love.

The next time you mouth off to your mother, ask yourself, was that love speaking? The next time you disappoint your teacher, ask yourself, was that love causing me to do that? When you love God, you obey God. When you love God you keep yourself pure from the filthiness of this world. And when you love God, you invest yourself in the lives of other.

God also loves us, of course. He loved us so much that He made a great investment in our lives. That is the substance of John 3:16. You cannot truly love others until you have experienced God's love.

## Savoring the Struggle

**Intro:** In the days before television there was more effort to hone our skills for story telling and the passing down of historical information through oral traditions. Many of the stories and legends which I remember hearing from the old folks as they gathered had to do, not with great hunters or great politicians, but rather, with great preachers and men of God. Hearing such stories benefited me in many ways, inspired visions about what I could do for Christ, and warned me of the pitfalls into which others had fallen. In addition to that heritage, I had the joy of growing up at a Christian conference center where I cut my teeth on the sermons of many great men of God. I also saw some of them up close as I served them their meals and parked their cars. These experiences enriched me in many ways. Strangely, however there was a lesson which I learned, almost incidentally as a result of this exposure, a lesson I have never been able to put aside. I determined that I never wanted to be anyone's legend.

The reason is this: Men who are legendary successes in one area of their lives are usually colossal failures in other areas, and the ratio seems to be exponential, the more legendary one is, the more observable his failures are. It is neither wholesome nor healthy to aspire to be someone else's legend. The man who is known for his wonderful mastery of the Greek may possibly be a terrible communicator. The man who is known for his fiery preaching may also have a fiery temper. In short, very few of our "legends" are balanced men of God. Virtually every genius to whom I have been exposed, in any field, has been eccentric.

Paul is a stated exception to this rule. Paul was so devoted to Christ that he was able to channel even his eccentricities to glorify Christ. He was balanced, He was scholarly, and he was intensely personal. He was driven, but he did not drive others. And, most of all, he was transparent.

As I meditated on these last few verses of chapter two I decided that I could not leave them behind without taking one more look at a man of God, caught up in the struggle, active in his ministry, and fulfilled in his ministry. There is still an example here from which we can learn. There is a glimpse of truth which we should not leave behind.

We shall call verses 12 and 13, A Glimpse of the Struggle, and we will call verses 14-16, A Glimpse of the Glory. Look first, then at verses 12 and 13 and catch:

### I. A Glimpse of the Struggle

*2Co 2:12 ¶ Furthermore, when I came to Troas to [preach] Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia. (AV)*

I see a focused Apostle in this passage, and he is focused on three things. First, I see

#### A. An Open Door

*Furthermore, when I came to Troas to [preach] Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord*

**1.) One thing to notice is that there is such a thing as opened and closed doors.** God raises up ministries and God closes them down, in his time. In Acts 14:27 we read how the Apostles returned to Antioch, the church which had released them to missionary work, and we read:

*Ac 14:27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. (AV) [Underline mine.]*

I choose not to struggle with you over the issues of the sovereignty of God and man's responsibility. I choose not to grapple today with issues of election and predestination. I desire only to emphasize this one fact: *God* opened this door of faith to the Gentiles. We are always obligated to preach this gospel, but there are times when we see more apparent success than at other times. There are times when God opens doors.

2.) This reminds us that we should seek open doors. We should not just close our eyes and place our fingers on a map and then decide that that is where God wants us to go. We should be listening for the call for help from Macedonia. We should be *watching* for the open door. Revelation 3:7 is a case in point:

*Re 3:7 ¶ And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. (AV)*

The word I want to emphasize here is the word *behold*. Behold, I have set before thee an open door. Open your eyes! God has an open door for the faithful Philadelphian. No man can shut that door. The only way failure can come is by failing to go through it.

Not only does God give open doors to individuals, but also, I believe He gives it to churches. While I cannot give you chapter and verse, I am of the certain conviction that God tailors special ministries and responsibilities to each assembly, just as He does individual believers. We have a door to go through.

**3.) The third thing you need to know about open doors is that passage through them usually intimates struggle.** It applies whether we are talking about the little strength of the Philadelphians here, or Paul's struggle for utterance which he wrote about to the Colossians:

*Col 4:3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: (AV)*

The door of utterance for the pastor on Sunday mornings is at least partially unlocked by the prayers of God's people on Wednesdays. Every week, folks in godly assemblies pray that there would be freedom in their pulpits.

But open doors usually open to struggle. Do you remember the words of Paul in chapter 16?

*1Co 16:8, 9 But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and [there are] many adversaries. (AV)*

This passage again reveals these two critical facts: First, Paul made his plans around open doors and secondly, open doors usually opened to great struggles. Opportunity, properly welcomed, brings the bedmate of adversity with it.

We are looking at Paul. We are considering his focus. The first thing we have seen is An Open Door. Notice secondly:

## **B. An Aching Heart.**

*, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother:*

We do not know a lot about this godly Greek. We know enough to know that he was involved in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians and that later he would pastor in Crete, setting up elders in churches there, where he would receive that famous letter which we call Titus in our Bibles.

We do not know a lot but we know enough, and we can almost read between the lines. Personally, I suspect that Paul is hinting at something here. He wants the Corinthians to know that his investment of Titus on their behalf to help settle *the Corinthian issue* has kept Titus from being here on the front lines with Paul at a time of strategic opportunity.

Is there a lesson from this? Of course there is. Every time Christian leaders have to focus on problems in the flock they are being kept off the firing line in some other area of ministry where their gifts and impact are needed.

Paul is not just hindered by Titus's absence, he longs for Titus, the person. He cares about Titus's own welfare. It just provides one more insight into the kind of heart which is fruitful. Paul cared about people. He cared deeply. He allowed his heart to ache for them. Some pastors cry for themselves. Some pastors cry for others. It is simple as that.

We see an Open Door and an Aching Heart. Now take one final Glimpse at the Struggle and notice in verse 13.

*2Co 2:13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia. (AV)*

I call this last sentence:

## **C. Itchy Feet**

*...taking my leave of them...I went from thence into Macedonia.*

At one point Paul stayed several years on one place, but the interval between packing suitcases was usually measured in months, or weeks, or sometimes, even days.

Some look at this verse and suggest that Paul has been forced to turn his back on the open door at Troas because he was so obsessed with the absence of Titus that he could not focus. I say that is neither logical nor in keeping with Paul's character. *The Lord* opened that door at Troas, and it is not likely that Paul just walked away from it for greener pastures. He would not have allowed the disobedience of the believers at Corinth to be the cause of his own disobedience.

Rather, the lesson to learn is that the servant of Christ must be willing to sleep with his sandals nearby. The cloud and the pillar may rest for a long time *or* for a short time. This is very often the price which the servant of Christ must pay, and it is more often than not the test which prospective servants fail. But there still is a lesson here for the meditating Christian.

The lesson is this: There is a difference between an open door and a greener pasture. There are two dangers for each saint who walks by faith: One is to stay when God is saying "Go," and the other is to go when God is saying "Stay!" There is a skill involved in following that cloud.

We will verses 14 and 15:

## II. A Glimpse of the Glory

*2Co 2:14 Now thanks [be] unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one [we are] the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who [is] sufficient for these things? (AV)*

There is something in Paul which savors the struggle. There is something in Paul which causes him to go looking for more trouble as soon as he gets out of what he is in. There is something in Paul which causes him to welcome the battle, much in the same way a seasoned warrior longs to be with his troops when he has been called away.

The secret was not simply found in Paul's great love for Christ and thankfulness for his past salvation. Nor did secret of Paul's stamina in the fray come from his past victories. The secret of Paul's great thirst for Christian warfare, his stalwart, forward pressing, never-say-die, "on to victory" spirit was found in his ability, not to look back but to look forward while pressing for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. We might say that Paul had one eye on his struggles but he had one eye on the clouds, and dimly through those clouds, he could see a coming day. What kind of a day did he see? He is describing it for us in these very verses. It is the day of Triumph, simply called in Roman times: The Triumph.

When a Roman leader went forth to a major battle he went forth in anticipation of his return. If he returned with a great victory and met certain requirements, the Senate would vote and he would be lawfully crowned as a *triumphant*. He had to have been the actual commander-in-chief in the battle. At least 5,000 of the enemy had to have fallen in a single engagement. New land had to have been acquired. In the Greek this was called the *thriambeutoni hemas*. There is absolutely no doubt in any serious student's mind that this is the picture that Paul is painting.

In the triumphal procession the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in a stated marching order. The state officials and the senators came first, then the trumpeters, then some of the spoils of war were paraded, even pictures of the captured land and models of the conquered ships were floated along in the parade. Then followed the white bull of sacrifice, the captive princes, leaders, and generals in chains who would shortly meet their fate. They were followed by the musicians and priests swinging their censers with their sweet smelling incense. Finally, the conquering general himself, fully clad in an embroidered purple toga with golden stars, and with an ivory scepter with the Roman eagle carved on the top. He was drawn in a chariot drawn by four horses, followed by his family, and then the triumphant armies! As they moved through the flower strewn streets the crowds shouted "Lo Triumpher!"



Now, that is the day Paul longed for! The day when His General, the Lord Jesus Christ would receive the glory due to His name. Paul knew that this coming day was worth all this suffering, all these church problems from within, and all the attacks of the enemy from without. What a glorious day this will be!

There were two groups in that parade, the prisoners who marched in front of the censers, and the victorious soldiers who marched behind. As that incense permeated the streets it carried two entirely different messages. Listen to Paul's words again:

*2Co 2:14 Now thanks [be] unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one [we are] the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who [is] sufficient for these things? (AV)*

I have on file an old clipping regarding the persecution of a Baptist church in Massachusetts. I want to read part of the article:

August 29 1996 (David W. Cloud, Fundamental Baptist News Service, 1219 N.Harns Rd., Oak Harbor, WA 98277) - A number of charges have been made against the Anchor Baptist Church (Independent Baptist) of Woburn, Massachusetts, and it is under aggressive investigation by the state Department of Social Services (DSS), local police departments, and the district attorney's office. The charge involves children and teenagers who allegedly were "lured" from housing projects on buses with promises of basketball, games, pizza, and a treasure hunt. According to the accusations, the children were taken, instead, to the church and were baptized. "Once inside, according to DSS sources, the children were asked to change into robes for the ceremony in which each child was dunked in a small pool or tub or water." The father of a sixteen-year-old who was involved in this, claimed that the kids were "told they were going to be baptized," and "the kids who didn't want to be baptized stayed in the main church and the other kids were taken downstairs to change."

It appears that the DSS is finding grounds for prosecution. According to a report in the Boston Globe on August 27, the DSS has determined that one 8-year-old boy was "emotionally harmed last month when he was allegedly brought to a Woburn church for baptism under false pretenses." DSS spokesman Robert Hutchinson said, "Clinically, there were enough grounds that the child was in an emotionally neglectful situation."

The Boston Globe reported that the caretakers for the child at the time of the alleged neglect were church members.

My purpose for reading the article is not to pronounce final judgment on any of the parties involved. It is to underscore a single point, Notice how completely opposite two views can be concerning the same incident. On the one side, we see a typical Baptist church winning boys and girls to Christ and baptizing those who have come to know the Lord in simple obedience to the great commission.

On the other side we see children being lured from housing projects with promises of pizza and basketballs. Once there they are being told to change their clothes in order to be dunked in a pool or a tub of water. Very clearly, here we have the legal basis for child neglect at best and child abuse at worst!

How can there be such a divergence? Because:

*For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:*

*To the one [we are] the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.*

*And who [is] sufficient for these things? (AV)*

It may be that we do not have the full story. It may be that that church could have done some things to avoid this persecution and these perceptions. It may be that, with proper communication and procedures, the whole problem could have been avoided. I do not know. But this one thing I do know: To the one [we are] the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life, and it will always be that way!

Now, the entire world may line up against the LORD and His anointed saying, Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us, but, He who sits in the heavens will laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision.

Unbelieving friend, as harsh as these words may sound, you would do well to heed to the words of this Psalm from which we have quoted:

*Ps 2:12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish [from] the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed [are] all they that put their trust in him. (AV)*

And believers, we would all do well to keep our eyes on the prize, to look for and long for that grand and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. That is when our General will triumph, once and for all, spoiling the enemies over whom He has already announced His victory.

HE will win. WE will win. Savor the struggle. The day of glory is dawning! Take your place in the fray!

## Living Letters

**Intro:** While it is not uncommon for me to carry around and preach from several different Bibles I do have one Bible which seems to end up with me in the pulpit more than others do. If you were to examine that Bible you would find several passages where the paper is stained from its heavy use. One of those places is Luke 4. I like to think I have something in common with Billy Sunday, for in this regard, no matter when or where Sunday was preaching. His Bible always lay open first to Luke 4:18. The second well worn passage in my Bible is Luke 24:44-48. The third and similar passage is Isaiah 42. The fourth passage is the chapter we are now examining. For, nowhere in the Word of God will you find my own personal philosophy of ministry articulated better than in these next two chapters. If you would know this writer's ministry you would know one which is obsessed with the messianic truths of God's Word. In this session, we only dip our toes into the water.

Paul has been defending his integrity. At least he has been using that issue as an occasion to teach us deeper truths. In reality, Paul taking a practical problem and using it to apply a great truth.

By way of a very short review, it appears that Paul had been challenged, accused of vacillating or of fearing to face his detractors, because he had made a change in plans. He explained that, because God does not vacillate, the servant of Christ must not vacillate, and that Paul's change in plans was for the benefit of the Corinthians, not his personal benefit. He explained that, a servant of Christ must be in control of his emotions, especially when dealing with people. (1.) He must be willing to wait when he wants to act, willing to act when he wants to wait. (2.) He must be capable of letting the problems of others affect himself. (3.) He must be a confronter that wants to know the proof of the working of God in the lives of his disciples. (4.) He can afford to be transparent, he can afford the suffering and he can afford the rigors of the battle because he looks forward to the day of Triumph.

Now, he continues the theme of *integrity*, integrity in the servant of God. We will call our first point:

### I. Integrity Required

Again, you will see that Paul is using this issue as an occasion to teach us. Paul is taking a practical problem, the issue of his own acceptance at Corinth, and using it to teach us a great truth. Look at the last verse of chapter 2:

*2Co 2:17 For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. (AV)*

It is apparent that we are breaking into the middle of a thought. Paul has been explaining that we *are* in a great warfare and there are two sides. To illustrate his truth he compares us to the great Roman procession of Triumph, put on for returning victors. We represent the savor, the incense, in that procession. He says we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ. To those whose sentence is death, our presence is the savor of death. To the victors, our savor is the savor of life. The same circumstances of this parade engender opposite responses. The world hates, and will continue to hate, the believer. It rejects our ministry and our message. Our sufficiency in this battle comes, not from ourselves, but from Christ.

But our striving must be lawful. Just as no general was crowned who did not meet the requirements of the Senate in conquest, no athlete is crowned unless he plays by the rules. Paul wrote to Timothy:

*2Ti 2:4,5 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of [this] life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, [yet] is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. (AV)*

Paul underscores these facts in verse 17:

*2Co 2:17 For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. (AV)*

Paul will reassert this in chapter four, but for now, grasp the core issue. We are talking about integrity. (1.) The servant with integrity does not vacillate. (2.) The servant with integrity savors the struggle because it is for the grand cause of Christ. (3.) Now add to these, *the servant with integrity handles the word of God with integrity*. In a sense, the subject has changed. It has changed from how we handle our *emotions* and how we handle ourselves, to how we handle the Word of God. We are now talking about fundamental integrity in ministry.

#### **A. The Man of Integrity Knows How *Not* to Handle the Word:**

*For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God:*

There were many false teachers in the time of Christ. In fact, there were probably more false teachers than there were true teachers. They functioned very much as modern liberals do today.

Consider a political analogy, using the example of former President Clinton. I am not making a political statement. I am drawing an illustration from the political process. My information comes from Democratic and liberal sources, when I say this, not from the right. The President and Hillary are extreme leftist liberals. The mood of the American public in recent years had been a shift back toward the right, at least to some extent as was evidenced by the Republican congressional landslide in Clinton's time. This President was a shrewd politician. In his bid for re-election he espoused generally known Republican causes in an effort to blur the lines of demarcation. Many things can be said about our former leader, but no one can say that he was stupid. He succeeded very well. The strategy is obvious. The *first thing* one must do, then, is to draw off strength from the opposite position by blurring the lines, especially when one is losing ground. The *second thing* a politician does is to use the same terminology to represent different causes. When a Democrat speaks of family values, he often means the exact opposite of what a Republican thinks of when he speaks of family values. This was clearly shown in the two conventions during that same election year. The Republicans said, it takes a home to raise a child. The democrats said, it takes a village to raise a child. There was a world of difference between those statements, though both were embracing family values. The *third thing* a politician may consider is to misrepresent what the other side really teaches. Now you have the formula for political success. These are tools of the trade for politicians, Democratic *and* Republicans.

Religious liberals do the same thing. They come in and sap the strength of the conservative movement. They go as far to the left as they can until their wallets and churches are empty. They then move back toward the middle to regain resources, and then, start the process over. When

the World Council of Churches gets into desperate financial troubles, she softens her extremist agenda and posits a more conservative stance, just enough to draw off money and support from the conservative element in mainline churches. She then plunges back into her agenda with renewed vitality. The same National Council of Churches which issued a scathing letter rebuking churches for not separating religion from politics during George Bush's re-election is the same N.C.C. which pumps out thousands of documents about politics and religion every year! They speak with forked tongue.

When Paul says in this verse, we are not as many, he was likely referring to the majority. Some early translators rendered this, "We are not as the rest..." It is an emphatic declaration that it will be the majority who will corrupt the Word.

The word *corrupt* catches our eyes because it carries a strong meaning in the Greek not conveyed fully here. It intones the image of a peddler who will sell anything if he can make a profit doing it. There is no social conscience where money is involved. In the not too distant past, there were stores that refused to sell cigarettes, alcohol, and pornography. They simply would not do it because they felt it hurt the community. Now, they would sell heroine if it would become legal. Their social conscience can be found in the cash register. It is their Bible. The dollar is the Holy Spirit of the business world and earns its right to be part of commercial Babylon honestly.

Is anyone huckstering the Word of God today? We might better ask, is there anyone who isn't? From the TV charlatans who ask you to send seed money for their trinkets, all the way to local churches who offer fluff and stuff in order to keep the attendance and offerings up, instead of feeding the sheep the Word of God are feeding off the sheep, we are a nation of religious charlatans.

We see how the man of integrity does *not* handle the Word of God, notice also:

## **B. The Man of Integrity Knows How to Handle the Word of God.**

*2Co 2:17 For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. (AV)*

He handles it as of sincerity, as of God, and in the sight of God.

1.) ...as of sincerity. This indicates that it will be handled *honestly*, and with the proper motive. This means that such a man will not shape every statement so as to appeal to the greatest number of folks, while cleverly obscuring other truths. The scriptures must not be handled the way news broadcasters handle the news. The scriptures are not to be used as teasers the way car salesmen want you to *think* you can buy their cars for zero down with zero interest and zero payments.

The idea behind this word is the idea of purity, transparency and ingenuousness. There are certain authors whose books I will not read, even though I agree with much that they have to say, because they do not handle the Word with sincerity. They choose rhetoric over scripture. The truth of God does not do well when we try to posture it.

2.) ...as of God. I believe that phrase refers to *authority*. If you do not believe this book is God's book, that this Word is His Word, you will never submit to its authority. During the years I produced the Answers! Magazine TV broadcasts this was one subject which I never let cool off, the

*authority* of the Word of God. Ninety-five per cent of all issues relating to God's Word today could be settled in a heartbeat if folks would submit to the authority of God's Word.

Some get around this authority by deciding that God has given their denominations special authority. Others claim that God has given them special authority in addition to the word of God through their church fathers or their revelations. If that were the case, those revelations would agree with the scriptures in every aspect. If we handle this book as of God, it means we attach great respect for it.

As an aside, pause, and consider the problem you are struggling with right now. You know the one I am talking about, the issue you are struggling with right now in your personal life as you read this. It is likely an issue of authority. You will either do what God's Word says you should do, or you will seek to modify or mitigate what you know you should do. You can go to a Christian counselor and come up with that conclusion after you have spent all of your money, or you can deal with it today. The persistent personal problem in your life today relates to the authority of this book in your life.

This means that the servant of Christ must speak with authority, particularly when he handles the Word of God. He has no choice. I rest my case on this old quote which I rattle off now and then:

"Except ye repent, it has been said, and confess your sins, as it were, and turn from your wicked way, to an extent, and be converted, in a measure, you'll be lost, so to speak."

When you speak from this book, don't cower like a dog that's been kicked, roar like a lion. It's God's book! Every word of it deserves our attention!

Then, notice the words, "in the sight of God." That tells us that this book must be handled with *accountability*. God has heard everything spoken in His classrooms, auditoriums, and home Bible studies. James said:

*Jas 3:1 ¶ My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*  
(AV)

You may how men of God dare to open the scriptures and speak at all. The answer is, we do not speak as teachers, from the world's perspective. We do not try to dazzle others with the riches of our past learning. We come as messengers. As a man of God, I do not come in my authority as a teacher; I come in the authority of Christ. I come with his message, not with mine.

Be apprised that accountability is not just for the speaker; it is for the listener alike. After visiting a church I recently helped plant, a pastor friend said to me, "When I see the kind of stand you take on the Word of God, it's a wonder that so many people attend your church." I did not take that as a compliment for myself. All I did was teach what is in front of me, right under my nose. I did take it as a compliment to my church family. I took from it that they would rather be under the ministry of the Word of God without a good music program and all the other bells and whistles, than in any other church with a great worship service and no food in the pulpit. I took it that God's people would rather suffer having their children in combined classes than to have them somewhere else where they are influenced by worldly trends. I took it that the Word of God is important to them and they wanted to be under its *authority*..

Someone handed me a flyer of the fall adult Sunday School offerings of a large evangelical church in the area I was then pastoring. Out of their scores of offerings, not one adult class offered Bible exposition. You cannot study the Bible in that church, you can only study about the Bible and hear passing references to it as you learn about marriage, finances, etc. Is there anything wrong with marriage classes? No. But someone needs to ask "Where's the beef?"

I do not point these things out to be critical. I point it out to remind you that the propagation of the Word of God is what we are *about*. It is our primary focus. Does the Bible speak to our finances? It does. Does it speak to our marriages? It does. But, if I were a betting man I would say that if you are having a problem with finances, or marriage, it is probably first an issue of authority. It is an issue of submission to what you already know to be the Word of God.

Now, embrace what Paul is saying:

*2Co 2:17 For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God:*

My wife and daughter came home from Hickory Farms carrying summer sausage lollipops. They were really quite clever, but such ideas should stay with Hickory Farms. We are not in the summer sausage business or in the lollipop business. We are not going to package the meat of the scriptures and sell it like lollipops. When you do that you get lollypop Christians every time.

*"...but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." (AV)*

"But as of sincerity," that's *honesty*. "But as of God," that's *authority*. "...in the sight of God speak we in Christ," that's *accountability*.

Every counseling session I have ever had in my life has related to one of those three words! The number one problem I have with people in counseling is honesty! The number two problem is authority, acknowledging that what is taught in this book applies directly to them, and not just their neighbor. The number three problem is accountability. Once having gotten folks to a position of honesty and recognition of the authority of God, the last hurdle is getting folks to be accountable in a measurable way for the changes they recognize they need to make. If I should ever hang my shingle out as a counselor, (a highly unlikely event), you can be sure there will be three plaques hanging on my wall, and they won't be my diplomas! They will be one-word plaques inscribed with *honesty, authority, and accountability*. Chances are, I would have a light counseling load.

That is the stuff of life. This is the stuff of counseling sessions. This is the stuff of preaching. This is the stuff of witnessing. But, please be careful to notice, all of it centers on a Person: Paul says: in the sight of God speak we *in Christ*. That is not an add-on, thrown in by Paul because it sounds good here.

When we begin to say, I want honesty in my life, I want the authority of God in my life, and I want accountability, we must also ask, how do I bring this about? Where do I begin? The starting point is always in the same place for the seeker, or for the believer who is fifty years old in the faith. It always starts with the second person of the Godhead, not the first. It must always start with Christ.

Are you experiencing a close walk with Christ today? If you are, the issues of honesty, authority, and accountability to the Word of God will be manageable in your life today. If you have somehow

removed your personal walk with Christ from this discussion and you are trying to please God in other areas while ignoring your intimate relationship with Him, you are doomed to failure.

Isn't it wonderful that success in the Christian walk geared first to a relationship with a Person? Do you remember how this study began? It began by referring to my favorite passages in the Bible. Those four passages are precious to me because *each one* speaks directly of Jesus Christ, His passion, His plan and His program. This whole book is His book.

If you walk away saying, I am determined that I am going to honestly submit to the authority of this book and make myself accountable to it, you are setting yourself up for failure. If you walk away saying, I am going to renew my relationship with Christ, on a personal basis, on an ongoing basis, you will find yourself doing what you never thought you could or would do. The secret is in a Person.

If you are without Christ today, the best discovery lies just ahead. The power of this book is in a Person, not just a creed. It is in a Person who says "Come unto me, " a Person who says:

*Joh 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (AV)*

Most likely, there are many around you who would be delighted to help you come to know this Person, today! You are always welcome to contact me, personally.



## Living Letters - II

**Intro:** When false teachers desire to undermine the ministry of the servant of Christ, they will always start with the issue of authority.

When a Mormon comes to your door, for example, he believes that he has a right to be there. He has been given the authority by Jesus Christ himself to teach the LDS version of the gospel. In the words of Joseph Smith who claimed that he was visited by God the Father and Jesus Christ in 1820, he claims to have been told:

"I must join none of them [churches], for they were all wrong; and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds [basic doctrines] were an abomination in his sight; that those professors [believers] were all corrupt" (Pearl of Great Price, Jos. Smith 1:19).

Mormon Apostle and theological authority Bruce McConkie said,

"The whole body of supposed Christian believers is properly termed apostate Christendom" (Mormon Doctrine, p. 131).

Thus, Mormonism claims, according to Doctrine and Covenants 1:30, to be: "...the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:30). The issue is an issue of *authority*.

When the truths of scripture are challenged from *within* Christianity, the issue usually focuses on *authority*. The charismatic, for example, cites his supposed *signs and wonders* as his authority, his proof that his message is right and our message is wrong.

It interests us that the Apostle Paul uses *neither of the above* claims though he could have used both, as *final* evidence for his authority. Paul *does* tell the believers in chapter 12:

*2Co 12:12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. (AV)*

Paul *did* assert his apostleship, and he *did* reference his signs and wonders as evidence of what God was doing through him, but, Paul cited an even stronger argument for his authority. So, for those Mormons who would arrogate to themselves Paul's apostleship, and for those charismatics who would replicate Paul's signs and wonders, let me provide some cud for chewing as we observe Paul pointing to a final source of authority, a proof of the integrity of his own ministry. We begin with verse 1 of 2 Corinthians 3 in order to make our point.

*2Co 3:1 ¶ Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some [others], epistles of commendation to you, or [letters] of commendation from you? 2. Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: (AV)*

We will call verses 1 and 2, The Letter Provided, and verses 3-6, the References Cited.

## I. The Letter Provided (vs. 1-2)

There is nothing wrong with the concept of letters of recommendation. There is no harm in providing one when you are asked for it. Paul, himself wrote a number of them, and was, himself, recommended by letter. The offense does not come from asking for such a letter. The offense comes when the thought is entertained that, after several years of ministry to the Corinthians, these particular believers would be so crass as to ask him for one.

While we cannot say for sure that he was officially asked for such a letter, we can be assured that the enemies of Paul were working feverishly to undermine his authority at Corinth. We can probably put some words in their mouths for them. They were probably saying that Paul was not a true apostle because he had not spent 3½ years with Christ as the other apostles had. He had not witnessed the resurrected Christ (or so they thought). The other apostles had not officially commissioned him. He was simply an independent, maverick type, who was accountable to no one.

Paul says, ah, but I *do* have a letter of recommendation. You are my letter. And this letter is far superior to someone else's recommendation. Have you ever hired someone based on another's recommendation? I have, and the incident I have in mind turned out to be a disaster.

You, Paul says, are our epistle, written in our hearts. In fact, if you will look closely at our text you will see that Paul is using a dual metaphor here. These Corinthians were epistles in two senses. First, they were Paul's epistle, written on his heart and the hearts of his coworkers. The whole group of Corinthians represented one letter of recommendation to be known and read of all men. Secondly, they were Christ's epistle. According to verse three they have been manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ. But they were not such an epistle as would be written with ink on paper. We are now going to see:

## II. The References Cited

*2Co 3:3 [Forasmuch as ye are] manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. (AV)*

If one is going to write a letter of recommendation, what are some of the elements which are required?

### A. The first requirement in a letter of recommendation is that it be identified.

It needs to be declared on one way or another that it is a letter of recommendation. Do we have that here? We certainly do: "[Forasmuch as ye are] manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ."

### B. The second requirement is that it be written by an authority.

Paul says Christ is the author. Christ is the letter writer. This adds a new note of seriousness to this. Christ has put His name, His recommendation upon me. I am proof that He continues to work, that He is still in control. My work commends or it diminishes Him.

I once hired an employee solely on the recommendation of another employer whom I thought I knew well. Her recommendation was a total disaster. I salvaged the situation as best as I could but my *image* of the one who recommended this person *was never quite the same*. The one she recommended was so unqualified I would never take her word again.

You are the proof of Christ's work. You are the evidence of His workmanship, according to Ephesians 2:10. You are to be known and read of all men and you may be the only Bible which many folks have ever seen. This is a weighty matter. You dare not be caught up in the controversies and scrapes which others get themselves in to. You dare not become gripped with the obsessions of others. You must not give in to your weaknesses and frailties because in so doing, you smudge the name of the One who recommends you. Christ has placed the authority of His name behind you.

When Jesus said, "... All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," Matthew 28:18, 19, He was placing His authority upon *you*. He was placing His name is on the letterhead of your letter of recommendation. Act like it!

### **C. The third requirement is that it be accurate and correct.**

*[Forasmuch as ye are] manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us,*

The word ministered is the word with which we associate deacon or servant. We may say, in a very loose sense, that Paul was the secretary in this process. The secretary does not write the letter, the secretary administers it. He or she transcribes it and delivers it to its destination. On the one hand, as such, the secretary can vouch for what has truly been said. On the other hand, the secretary can do great injury to the letter if he, himself is not careful. The role of the secretary is an important one. He must not deviate from the intent of the author.

*You fill this role* when you, in turn, take your responsibility from God seriously and disciple others in salvation and in the Christian walk. They now become the ones ministered by you. They become *your* business letters.

### **D. The requirement is that it should provide is evidence of capability.**

Paul continues with the words:

*written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God ;not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. (AV)*

We have to keep the whole analogy in front of us in order to keep the picture fresh. [1.] Christ is the author of the letter. [2.] Paul is the secretary who holds the pen. We now come to the writing materials: [3.] The Holy Spirit is the ink. [4.] The Corinthians *themselves* are the tablet.

When we talk about writing materials, the choice of the ink does not surprise us. It would make sense that the Holy Spirit is the one who applies the truths of God's Word to our hearts. But the "paper," now that surprises us. Who would choose flesh over rock? Rock is durable. Flesh is corruptible. This part of the illustration could puzzle us. It could puzzle us, that is it would puzzle us if we did not see what Paul was up to.

Paul has just expanded his subject in a marvelous, mind boggling way. He is no longer talking simply about his ministry among the Corinthians. He is no longer simply defending his authority. That was just an excuse to launch Paul into a far more expansive and important subject, the New Covenant!

Perhaps we could illustrate it this way. Once you have learned about the concept of electrons orbiting around the nucleus of an atom, you will have no difficulty understanding the concept of planets orbiting around the sun. It is the same principle, only on a much larger scale. So it is with the letter of recommendation. Once we see the principle played out on a small scale, a simple letter of recommendation, we will be prepared to understand the same principle on a far larger scale.

This is the small picture: These Corinthians are living letters of recommendation to the quality of Paul's work. That is far superior to a written letter of recommendation which could be forged, altered, or could misrepresent the truth.

This is the big picture: The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant. The old covenant represents a written letter of recommendation, written literally on tables of stone, the Ten Commandments. The New Covenant represents a living letter of recommendation, written literally on hearts of flesh.

In the next chapter we will enlarge this big picture. We will prove from the Old Testament that the tables of stone represent the Ten Commandments, or the Old Covenant. We will show that the fleshly tables of the heart represent the writing of the New Covenant. We have much good information to cover theologically in that regard. But, we want to keep one fundamental thought in the cross hairs. We want to keep Paul's fundamental argument in front of us. The argument is this:

In the final analysis, the proof of Christianity lies in its ability to transform the life *from within*, rather than from without. While this almost sounds clichéd, it is basic to all. This is the point the Mormons have missed. This is the point the Jehovah's Witnesses have missed. This is the point the Roman Catholics have missed. This is the point that all of those who teach salvation by works have missed. This is why their authority is false. This is the essential definitive element which separates us. Miss this point and you miss everything. False religion reforms a man from the outside in. True religion - converts a man from the inside out. That can only happen when God makes the change.

The law, as we will learn in the next chapter, was graciously given by God to show man that reformation, changes from the outside inward, can never save a man. Men refuse to believe this.

Here is a case in point. Have you ever had a Mormon try to lead you to Jesus Christ? Have you ever known a Jehovah's Witness to try to bring you to the point of true repentance and conversion to Christ? A Catholic priest may tolerate your conversion experience, but he knows in his heart that you are simply not assured of heaven until you have met his list of *requirements*. In their minds, reformation and performance brings about salvation, maybe. The Greek Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the Mormons all have literature available to you explaining what they call "The heresy of the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith alone."

Yet, the verses in front of us argue the very opposite. They argue that the work of God begins in the heart and that we are result of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Paul says:

*2Co 3:4 And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: 5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency [is] of God; (AV)*

Such trust have we through Christ to God-ward!  
We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves.  
We are not capable of saving ourselves.  
We are not capable of keeping ourselves saved.  
We are not capable of transforming others.

Our *sufficiency* is of God. God initiates the process; the Holy Spirit implements the process. The tables of our hearts are recipients of the process. God simply allows you and me to be instruments *in* the process. The changed life comes about through the changed heart, not the reformed life which still relies on its own sufficiency. That is the stuff of true Christianity.

Do you remember Joseph Smith's quote? He said -

"I must join none of them [churches], for they were all wrong; and the personage who addressed me said that all their **creeds** [basic doctrines] were an abomination in his sight; that those professors [believers] were all corrupt" (Pearl of Great Price, Jos. Smith 1:19).

With Joseph Smith, you see, the issue was which *church* should I follow? Which *creed* should I believe? He never understood, to his dying day that salvation is not in a creed or a church. It is in a Person. Salvation is not the process of reforming your ways; it is the act of the Holy Spirit whereby He transforms your heart.

For all of the failings of these Corinthian believers, Paul knew he had them where he wanted them. They knew that they had been converted. They knew that the work of the Holy Spirit had begun in their lives. They knew in their hearts that what was going on in their lives was real not just some imagined "burning in their bosoms".

Keep in mind that these Corinthians were not perfect, but that was the point exactly. Their sufficiency was of God, not of themselves. Conversion comes first, and change comes as a result of this Holy Spirit writing on the tables of the heart. It never works the other way.

*Php 2:12 ¶ Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of [his] good pleasure. (AV)*

As Paul explained to the Philippians, we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who works in us. Why do we do this with fear and trembling? The fear and trembling is regarding whether we will be poor letters of recommendation! Lest our letters be so poorly written that none can read them. Some have so blackened the name of Christ by personal behavior that they confuse the very religionists who argue reformation instead of transformation! Some dear Christians desperately need to make the outside correspond to what they say they believe on the inside.

## The New Testament

**Intro:** In the tradition of Rabbinic hermeneutics Paul has been using the teaching technique of going from the known to the unknown. Or stated in other terms, it is the argument of going from the lesser to the greater.

The lesser in this case, is the discussion of letters of recommendation and Paul's claim that these very Corinthians were his own personal letters of recommendation, and more, importantly, they were the epistle of Jesus Christ himself. We who know Christ are living letters. That was the discussion of the lesser. But it was only a sales leader of sorts, for Paul has bigger game in his sights.

Paul's transition from the lesser to the greater, and his true intent is about to be revealed. Look first at verse three...

*2Co 3:3 [Forasmuch as ye are] manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. (AV)*

That is the argument of the lesser, which we have already studied. Now look at verse six and move on to the greater argument. Watch the whole scene change before our eyes:

*2Co 3:6 ¶ Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. (AV)*

We just took a quantum leap. Let me illustrate the shift that has just taken place. If I were to talk with most folks about the Touchdown Jesus they would probably return a blank stare. The term has no meaning in the general population. To understand it properly, one would need to know a little about three worlds, the world of football, the world of religion, and the world of Notre Dame. If you were to sit in the football stadium on the campus you would be quick to notice that the end of the stadium gives way to an imposing view of a multi-storied building which has a mural of Jesus painted on it. This is not just any Jesus, but a representation of Jesus standing with his hands stretched upward, very much in the posture of the referee who raises his hands to pronounce that a kick has been good. Now, that good Catholic boy who prepares to make that kick looks up directly into the image of Jesus. In his mind, he sees himself as not simply as representing a football team, but representing Catholicism and Jesus Himself. He sees a much greater picture. He is now part of a much greater cause than just his own success.

To understand this passage you need to know a little about three worlds, the world of the Corinthians, the world of the Jews, and the world of Christianity.

The very minute Paul mentions the phrase "not in tables of stone", his Jewish readers knew he had upped the ante. We are no longer talking about the "football game" at Corinth, we are talking about much larger and greater issues which are at stake. Paul has boldly dared to escalate the discussion and to explain that what is occurring on a small scale at Corinth is the very reason why Christianity, in toto, is superior to Judaism.

Both Christianity and Judaism were based on covenants. Judaism was based upon the covenant made by God first through Abraham. The temporary administration of the Abrahamic Covenant was given to Moses at Mount Sinai. We call this the Old Covenant, or the Old Testament. A future covenant that would completely fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant was then promised to the Jewish people, and it is called the New Covenant. It was called the New Covenant in contrast to Moses' covenant given at Sinai. This covenant was ratified by blood at the cross.

As we proceed we will need to look at just a few verses in the book of Exodus, chapter 34 in order to understand what Paul is saying. Paul will provide two evidences for the superiority of the New Covenant. First, we will see The New Covenant is Superior by Virtue of its Administration. We will then see The New Covenant is Superior by Virtue of its Application.

## **I. The New Covenant is Superior by Virtue of its Administration**

Because we have already read verse three you are prepared for what Paul is teaching:

The New Covenant is *personal* where the old one was *impersonal*. It is written with the Spirit of the *living* God. Paul notes that we are able ministers of the New Covenant because it is the covenant of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. As noted previously, this stands in contrast with the cultists who deny the existence of the Holy Spirit. Struggle as they will, they will continue to seek to have a personal experience with an impersonal religion, trying to convince themselves with their *minds* that they are right.

This, new ministration of the New Covenant is not just personal, it is *portable*. You may not see it right here in the immediate text, but it needs to be pointed out at this time. When God promised the New Covenant, we read in Jeremiah 31:33:

*Jer 31:33 But this [shall be] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (AV)*

The Old Covenant which God made with Israel could only be kept on one place at one time. And, when it had to be moved it was moved with great care. More than one man died in the process of moving this covenant around. Its access was restricted. It was external.

The ministration of the New Covenant is also *practical* because it is written on fleshy tables, not tables of stone. Time forbids us to consider all the effects and ramifications, both now and in the future, of having the law written in our hearts instead of on tables of stone, but consider just this one: Think of the simple dilemma the Jewish people have in keeping the Sabbath. If the Sabbath goes from sunset to sunset, consider the problem the Jews have who live in Alaska. Theoretically, one can only be an obedient Jew who *lives in Israel* and worships at God's temple using God's furniture. How does one minister such a covenant? Obviously, God was gracious to those Jews who did not have the immediate advantage of location, but that is not the point. The point is, the Old Covenant was dry docked in Jerusalem. The New Covenant *and its administration* is within the believer.

The New Covenant has a superior ministration because it is a ministration of spirits, our spirits, under the control of the Holy Spirit. This is why the Bible says that if any man has not the Spirit of God he is none of His. It is the Holy Spirit who ministers the New Covenant in our hearts.

## II. The New Covenant is Superior By Virtue of its Application.

### A. It is Superior because of its power.

Look at verses 7 -9 and enjoy a little of Paul's logic:

*2Co 3:7 But if the ministration of death, written [and] engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which [glory] was to be done away: 8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? 9 For if the ministration of condemnation [be] glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. (AV)*

At first reading we may be a little surprised that Paul would call the Ten Commandments the ministration of death. But in truth, that is all they were. All the law could ever do was to pronounce judgment, even when it was graciously reissued by God after Israel's colossal failure. A man called me on the telephone and, after a few minutes of parlaying, said: "I want you to know that I am a bad boy. I am not a murderer, but I have broken at least one of the commandments."

This man was experiencing the results of that law. But he was in error. For, he had not broken just one or two of those commandments; he had broken all of them. And consider Israel! Moses goes to the Mount and while he is receiving the Ten Commandments, Israel is down below breaking the very first commandment!

And so, God graciously rewrites those commandments, preparing Israel for the ultimate lesson: You can never satisfy the righteousness of a Holy God. That's why Paul says, the letter kills in verse 6. All it could ever do was to pronounce death. The New Covenant, on the other hand, is the ministration of righteousness. It is called that because it imparts the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the believer. It declares him righteous. It is the message of life. What a contrast!

### B. It is Superior because of its permanence.

Verses 10 and 11 carry on the theme:

*2Co 3:10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. 11 For if that which is done away [was] glorious, much more that which remaineth [is] glorious. (AV)*

By now, you have noticed that Paul keeps bringing up this word glory and glorious. This is no small matter, and I promise you that we will follow this important thread later. But, set that aside, for the moment and keep this argument squarely fixed. Something which is *permanent* and *present* is of much greater value than something which has been *done away* or abolished. Learn these two vital facts and never let them go:

**1. First, the New Covenant *is* present.** Some dispensationalists say it is not. They say it is yet to come. In fact, there is a new trend among our fellow travelers to imagine a separate covenant for



the church, or worse, “a New Covenant *kind* of ministry” for the church. Don't you believe it! It is beyond the scope of this study, but never, never give in to such an appalling thought!

Grasp the second thought. While the New Covenant *is* present:

**2. The Old Covenant is no longer present.** It is gone, kaput. Done away. Abolished. Gone forever. This, is the bitter pill which Adventism has never been able to swallow.

Not one stitch of the Ten Commandments remains for Israel or for us to obey. They were abolished. Can we ever pull them out of the grave and dust them off for any purpose? We may use the law to show men their sinfulness and to illustrate biblical principles taught under the New Covenant (1 Tim. 1:1-10, Eph. 6:1,2), but the Old Covenant must never be applied as a means to engage the Christian walk. Its dynamics are devastating to the Christian walk. Read Romans 7.

Now, look at verse 12

### **C. It is Superior because of its plainness.**

*2Co 3:12 ¶ Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: (AV)*

Again, we'll come back treat this veil. We will consider all the aspects of the Shekinah glory as they relate to this passage. We will develop the argument. For this study, we are looking only at the basic building blocks of the passage. Paul says, that based on the great hope which the New Covenant offers, we can speak with great boldness, great openness, great clarity, and great directness.

This kind of boldness could not occur under the Old Covenant.

Dr. Ironside tells the story of a conversation he had with a Catholic priest. Ironside was quoting 1 Thess 4:16:

*1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (AV)*

He then said to the priest, "When that time comes, I am going up with that ransomed throng, I am going to be caught up to be forever with the Lord." The priest looked at him with a puzzled look and said: "My dear sir, you must think you are a very great saint to be so sure that you will be taken up at that time." Ironside replied: "No; it is not that I think I am a great saint, I am really one of the least of all saints, and I found out some years ago that I was a great sinner; but I found out that Jesus is a great Savior, and that He manifests great grace to great sinners by taking all our sins and settling for them on Calvary's cross. And so I trust Him, and trusting Him I know my sins are gone, and therefore I am able to rest in His Word."

You see, that is a *great hope*. That is great plainness of speech, and it is all based on a great New Covenant provided by a great Savior! We are not arrogant when we make the claim that we are saved and we know we are saved because we are not resting on our own goodness. We are confident because we are resting on the blood of the New Covenant.

### **D. It is Superior because of its performance.**

Leave verses 14-17 for another study and finish this chapter with verse 17:

*2Co 3:17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord [is], there [is] liberty. :18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, [even] as by the Spirit of the Lord. (AV)*

What liberty is Paul discussing here? I have heard this verse quoted in some of the strangest contexts! If a pastor delivers a particularly good message, someone may say, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty!" and everyone says "Amen! Amen!"

Well, I don't suppose that does a great deal of harm because the Lord does provide liberty for ministering His Word, but I think we would do better to ask ourselves, what is Paul saying here? Why did he insert that verse right here? I'm not even sure that Paul is talking here about liberty from the bondage of the law, though that is certainly implicit in the passage.

He is talking, to some extent, about the great plainness of speech mentioned earlier in verse 12. I will prove that in a minute. But, I think it is more likely that the word *but* in verse 18 is our *connector* and the key to unlock the secret of what Paul is saying. The use of the word *but* means that the liberty of verse 17 is from the practice of verse 18. It means that the liberty Paul is talking about here is a precious liberty, the liberty, (may we say it and not be misunderstood?) to look God in the face, the liberty to enjoy the presence of Christ in the life!

And it is in peering into that Face; it is in experiencing that presence of Christ in your life, that subtle changes begin to take place in your walk. Appetites change, values change, desires and goals and friends and all of the habits of life change. Looking into that Face produces the great plainness of speech. So argues the book of Acts in 4:13:

*Ac 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. (AV)*

So we bring ourselves to the question am I benefiting all that I can from the New Covenant? Have I enjoyed the *power* that takes one from death unto life? Am I enjoying the *power* or liberty to be changed into His image?

In Lewis Sperry Chafer's church, Chafer always took the time to interrupt when the congregation sang "Take Time to Be Holy. " He used to say, "This is how I want you to sing it: 'Take time to behold Him.'" You see, when one takes time to behold the living Christ he has no problem taking time to be holy. Are you not satisfied with your performance, not satisfied with your growth? Spend some time enjoying the presence of the living Christ. He hasn't gone anywhere!

2 Cor. 3:13-18 (Read Exodus 34 to prepare.)

## On Veils and Glory

Intro:

*1Co 1:22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: (AV)*

When Paul noted in 1 Corinthians 1:22 he was making no small statement. He was alluding to the fundamental difference between the two bloodlines of men, a difference so broad that it can only be spanned in Christ, who makes us one. This deep psychological chasm which separates us was cut by the rivers of our bloodstreams and leeches to the very ordering of our DNA code. We peer over the edge of this cavern and try to understand one another, but, in the final analysis, must concede that we, (Gentile and Jew) function on two different platforms as distinctive as the IBM, versus the MAC. The IBM would, of course, be the Gentile, and the MAC the Jewish expression of our psychological differences, (Smile.)

To this point we have treated 2 Corinthians 3 as though we are Gentiles. We have tried to follow the logic and the flow of the passage, to be both synthetic and analytical in true Gentile style. We have showed you that the issue all along has been authentication. Paul has claimed, according to 2:17 that we do not need to corrupt or huckster the Word of God as some do. This is because our message has integrity. When the message has integrity its presentation does not need to be deceitful.

And so, Paul first defended his own integrity, first, by showing the Corinthians that they themselves were living proof of the quality of his personal ministry. Secondly, he had bigger game in his sight. He began showing us how the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant. Paul has shown whole theological system of Christianity is superior to Judaism with impeccable logic and wisdom. This New Covenant is [1.] Personal, where the old was impersonal; [2.] it is Portable and Practical where the old was inflexible; [3.] it is Powerful, as the ministration of life, where the old could only announce failure and death; [4] it is Permanent, where the old was temporary and fading; [5] And it Performs. As we peer into the face of the Lord we are changed. This is something the Old Covenant could not do.

Our problem is this. So far, we have only viewed this passage from the Gentile point of view, from the logical point of view. We have not seen it as a Jew would see it, and that alone is the challenge of this study.

When one goes elephant hunting, he does not take along a pea shooter. He takes an elephant gun. Paul is on an elephant hunt and he is using an elephant gun. He is going to aim at the very heart of Judaism with its love for signs and phenomena.

### I. The Phenomena of the Old Covenant

For the sign loving Jew, the greatest of all signs accompanied the presentation of Jehovah and the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai. When those dark clouds covered that Mountain and it quaked and trembled at the presence of the living God who appeared there, the children of Israel cowered back

in awesome fear of the glory of this Divine Visitor. In the interest of saving their own skins they wisely suggested that Moses himself might be the best man to entertain this heavenly Presence.

What they saw when Moses returned was an image so glorious that it etched itself permanently into the memories of Jews for all time. Moses, who had been in the presence of the living God, was irradiated.

Now, the glory that was associated with the presence of God, has long since been called, the Shekinah glory. It is not a biblical word. It is not even a Jewish word. It is an Arabic word which simply denotes the glory which was associated with the presence of God.

We can trace the presentation of this Shekinah glory very easily from this point forward. [1.] We see it in the pillar of fire and the cloud - [2.] we see it in the Holy of Holies associated with the tabernacle and with Solomon's temple. [3.] Our hearts are saddened as we see this glory officially leave the temple by stages in Ezekiel's day, leaving Israel without her glory, *without her authenticating witness*. It is in this context that Paul brings up this argument here in chapter three.

## II. The Phenomena of the New Covenant

In verses 6-12 Paul makes the absolute unqualified assertion that the New Covenant is more glorious than the Old. What he means is that the Shekinah glory, once associated with the Old Covenant, is manifest in even greater abundance on this covenant. Notice how many times the words glory and glorious occur in these verses..

*2Co 3:7 But if the ministration of death, written [and] engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which [glory] was to be done away: 8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? 9 For if the ministration of condemnation [be] glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. 10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. 10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. 11 For if that which is done away [was] glorious, much more that which remaineth [is] glorious. 12 ¶ Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:*

The issue is glory. The Jew may no longer brag that his covenant is superior based upon the Shekinah glory which had surrounded it. Paul then goes on to argue that Moses veiled his face, not to shield Israel from the glory, but to shield her from the fading glory. It was not time yet, for Israel to understand the full implications that this covenant would be replaced by yet another covenant. We find this argument presented in verses 13-16. But there is more to accomplish before setting this issue aside.

*If the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant by virtue of its superior glory, where then, is the Shekinah glory? Any self respecting Jew is going to ask that question. It is only logical. The Shekinah glory *authenticated* the administration of the Old Covenant. Where can we go to see the Shekinah glory revealed?*

Paul's response is, the glory is alive and well and it is right here. You just can't see it!

Unlike Paul, New Age hucksters *must* use deception in order to hawk their lies. In a recent Sacramento psychic exposition sponsored by Evolving Times they were huckstering their lies with

their new aura camera which photographs your aura for you. Listen friend, you may or may not have an identifiable field around you as a result of the electrolytic nature of your neurological system, but you do not have a spiritual unless you have the living Christ dwelling within you. Then, according to Paul, the Shekinah glory is alive and present within you! Don't run off to the new age counterfeit when you can have the real thing in Jesus Christ. Satan knows about the glory of God and he knows that God vests that glory in the believer. Satan is desperate to counterfeit this true glory.

And for the Gentiles among us, please understand there is a tangible phenomenon here. We are not simply arguing a theological point. We are arguing a practical point, the glory of God can and does radiate from the believer. Its primary function is to authenticate the message you bear and the Person whose name you bear. Now, you may be looking at yourself in the spiritual mirror and asking, "Where is my glory? I don't see much evidence of it." And we will come to that shortly.

First, let's answer the critical Jews that are trying to stare Paul down. Why can't they see this glory? Do they need a special camera? Paul gives the explanation in verses 13-16.

*2Co 3:13 And not as Moses, [which] put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: 14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which [vail] is done away in Christ. 15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. 16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. (AV)*

There was a novel news story of a man who placed a paper bag over his face in order to burglarize a store. He forgot, however, to cut holes in the mask for his eyes. As a result, he just pulled the bag off and went on with his thievery. The video camera revealed that he was the security guard of the building. These criticizing Jews are very much in the same boat. They exposed their own blindness. If there were no veil over their eyes they would see the truth of this glorious gospel and be gloriously saved.

A friend of mine had eye surgery. They took out his old lens and put in a new lens. He has been absolutely stunned, not only at the detail which he can now see, but also at the clarity. When he opens his good eye, everything is white and bright. When he opens his other eye, everything has a yellow tinge to it, the result of normal aging and response to the UV rays of the sun. He did not know what he was missing.

These Jews did not know what they were missing. If you are here without Christ, as we noted in our previous chapter, you have no idea what you are missing in Christ. We try to tease you with our testimonies and we try to cajole you, but until you have tasted a plate of this salvation food for yourself you will never know how good it is.

So, in a word, we see that the eyes of the Jewish people as a whole have been veiled. This does not mean a Jew cannot be saved. Paul makes it clear that God is saving a remnant from His people. Nor does it mean that it will always be this way. One day, the veil will be removed according to verse 16. But the sad fact is that most Jews have rejected this New Covenant.

It's time to address the Gentile question. How is this glory revealed in us? 1. On the negative side, can we veil our own eyes as the Jews did? And, 2., on the positive side, can we know the secrets of revealing this tangible glory in our own lives? How do we turn all this theology into practice? Are there any steps which we can take to release this Shekinah glory in our experience?

## 1. In answer to the first question, can we veil our own eyes? the answer yes, we surely can.

While no one should recommend Barclay without understanding his view on inspiration, he makes a worthy point here:

1. We may veil our own eyes by prejudice. This happens when we go to the Word of God with our own presuppositions and insist on making it say what we want it to say. We love to embellish the Word of God and make verses say more than God intends.

The ancient Jews, for example, were not content with this story of Moses. As the years progressed they were teaching that the glory of Moses never left his face for the rest of his life. They finally began insisting that the glory on Moses face remained right with his body in the grave.

2. We may veil our own eyes by wishful thinking. We find what we want to find in our Bibles. We read what we want to read. For example, we may go to the Psalms and delight in all of those passages which extol the love and mercy and greatness of God and skip over all of those passages which speak of His judgment, wrath, and anger. When we do this, we are pulling the wool over our own proverbial eyes.

3. We may veil our own eyes by fragmentary thinking. We do this by not viewing the Bible as a whole and seeing its great themes and arguments. Or worse, we veil our own eyes when we neglect the study and learning of the Word of God. We have never lived in an hour when it was more incumbent upon Christians to follow Paul's admonition:

*2Ti 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (AV)*

The eyes of believers everywhere are being veiled to the real issues.

But all of those problems, prejudicial thinking, wishful thinking, and fragmentary thinking are only symptomatic. The veil which covers our eyes is usually is the result of a deeper problem, a problem between ourselves and the living God.

It is a coldness of heart that sets in like winter on our souls. Again, I allude to Barclay.

**1. Sometimes it is the veil of disobedience.** When we resist, when we disobey, we lose the sensitivity, the tenderness, the hungering and the longings for the things of God. And those calluses don't drop off easily. Soon, we're not just dealing with a symptom; we're dealing with a whole syndrome. This is what happened with Israel. Moses did not make Israel blind. She was already cavorting with idolaters before he ever arrived on the base of the hill.

Right is right and wrong is wrong. The vision of the whole world has become so obscured on this point that few worldlings can even discern truth anymore. We came across a quote from Ted Koppel a while back which he delivered at a commencement exercise. [I have modified one phrase for the sake of sanctity in public reading. - JPS]

"We have actually convinced ourselves that slogans will save us. Shoot up if you must; but use a clean needle. Enjoy sex whenever and with whomever you wish, but protect yourself. No! The answer is no. Not because it isn't cool or smart or because you might end up in jail or in an aids ward, but no because it's wrong, because we have spent 5,000 years as a race of rational human beings, trying to drag ourselves out of the primeval slime by searching for truth and moral absolutes. In its purest form, truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder. It is a howling reproach. What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions."

*ABC Nightline Moderator, Ted Koppel, at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, giving the 1987 commencement address.*

Even the secular world sees the inevitable end of our present march toward unbelief.

Sometimes is flat disobedience that places that veil over the eyes of men.

**2. Sometimes it is the veil of an unteachable spirit.** We see this so much with young people. There are none so blind as those who refuse to see.

In our next study we will continue with the secret which is required for unveiling the glory of God in our lives. But, for now may I suggest that you get a little "light treatment" to help your condition? I'm not suggesting that you go to the tanning booth or sit under one of those daylight generators. Rather, I end at the exact verse where we left off in the previous chapter, verse 18:

*2Co 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, [even] as by the Spirit of the Lord. (AV)*

I want to build just a little more on what we started previously, just enough to keep the verse fresh in our minds. Notice that we are talking about a *process*, a divine process that occurs in our daily lives as a result of the New Covenant:

*2Co 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, [even] as by the Spirit of the Lord. (AV)*

1. "But we all..." It is a *universal* process. "But we all..." This is not just an experience for ministers or teachers.

2. "...with open face..." It is an *uninhibited* process. We can look the Lord in the eyes. This is amazing!

3. "...beholding as in a glass" or a mirror. It is a *reflective* process. Where do we go to behold the Christ of this covenant? God changes us through the mind, through meditation on His Word. Christ reveals Himself to us in the Scriptures.

4. "...the glory of the Lord" - is a *Christ centered* process. It is not self centered. The world says "look inward," "meditate in order to bring the best of yourself out." The Christian says, look upward. Focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. His glory will change you. You will find no glory in yourself.

5. "...are changed into the same image." It is a *transforming* process. We are actually metamorphosed or transfigured. Perhaps we could call it mutation of the soul. But this is not just any transformation. It is a transformation into Christlikeness!"

6. "...from glory to glory." It is a *growing* process. There are no short cuts! No second works of grace! No quantum leaps! No overnight solutions, just life changing maturation.

7. "... [even] as by the Spirit of the Lord" It is a *spiritual* process. The Holy Spirit oversees this metamorphosis.

Can we then, accelerate this process? The answer is, yes, by reflecting on the person of Christ through meditation upon His Word, and through obedience unto Christ His glory can shine through us.

So, where are you in this process? Is the veil still over your eyes? Have you tried to withdraw from the process?

What are you going to do about it today?



## New Covenant Dynamics

**Intro:** If it has been correctly stated that the book of Romans is the Magna Charta of the faith, we may just as rightfully say that 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 represents the Constitution of the Faith. It is the foundation, the bedrock upon which all New Testament doctrine rests, even the doctrine of justification by faith. This passage provides the legal justification for the stunning claims which Paul makes in Romans. But Paul's presentation of this New Covenant is far more than just a legal declaration. This covenant comes with a manual, an instruction book, for its proper use and application. It is that manual which we presently study.

By now, it should be hard to forget the argument of the passage because it has been repeated so aggressively. The issue has been *integrity*. The issue has been the authentication of Paul's personal ministry, and the doctrine of Christ.

Let's finish the argument of chapter three.

### I. The Phenomenal Nature of the New Covenant

In the previous chapter Paul stressed the phenomenal nature of the New Covenant. Its *glory* exceeds the glory of the Old Covenant in every way. We concluded in a very practical way, stressing how the New Covenant is worked out on a practical basis in the life of the New Covenant believer:

*2Co 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, [even] as by the Spirit of the Lord. (AV)*

The Shekinah glory is still present and available in the ministration of the New Covenant.

Regretfully, our chapter division comes in a very inconvenient place here, for verses 1 and 2 of chapter four really represent the conclusion which Paul expects us to draw from the argument of chapter three. Notice the word *therefore*:

*2Co 4:1 ¶ Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (AV)*

If God provides the phenomena as authentication for our New Covenant, we do not need to be manufacturing our own means to gain the ear and attention of unbelievers. In a word, *if* we believe the truth of verse 18 in chapter three, it will affect the way we proclaim that truth. Look at a few of these phrases so that we, ourselves, can avoid being caught up in the improper presentation of the New Covenant.

#### A. The Glorious nature of the New Covenant enables its minister:

*Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;*

We do not become weary or exhausted. We cannot read into Paul's mind, but it makes sense that Paul is still contrasting the old with the new here. There was an undeniable element of drudgery associated with the ministry of the Old Covenant. There was no enablement associated with it. This is not to say that the New Covenant is a bed of Roses. We will discover, much to the contrary, that it can very well be a bed of sorrow and suffering. But, still, there is an essential difference between the two covenants. Note it again:

*Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;*

What is the mercy associated with this New Covenant which was *not* associated with the old? Is it a redemptive mercy? It is in a broad sense, but, more specifically, it is the privilege of accessing the presence of God, of beholding the Lord ourselves. It is a *mercy* because God withholds the judgment rightfully due to us and allows us into His presence, in the Person of His Son. And once in that presence we are transformed. Because the source of our strength is exhaustless, we need not burn out. I speak, of course, about the heart, not the body. Even Christ wearied and was required to rest His body.

Paul is not telling us that we should not faint if we are good Christians; He is telling us that we *will not* faint when we take advantage of the mercies of this New Covenant. We have inward help. To avoid misunderstanding, be aware that the scriptures under *both* the Old Covenant and the New Covenant promise strength for the weary servant. Isaiah said:

*Isa 40:29 He giveth power to the faint; and to [them that have] no might he increaseth strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew [their] strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; [and] they shall walk, and not faint. (AV)*

But, the beauty and power of the New Covenant is that it provides ready and immediate access to the presence of God and therefore offers instantaneous relief for the soul. Secondly,

## **B. The glorious nature of the New Covenant speaks for itself.**

Paul states this both negatively and positively.

### 1. Negatively, he says:

*But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully*

Perhaps a good way to say it is like this. It is not likely that you are going to find a sales representative for your local village of luxury homes sitting at a table in the back of your local flea market. It would demean the good image of luxury homes to have them sold by scroungy, scrubby, wheeler dealers who have their tables rented out for five bucks a pop. Yet, this is exactly what has happened with the gospel today. It is being hawked, not proclaimed, in a manner which brings great shame upon it.

Further, the New Covenant is being commended to many based on craft and deceit.

No one has done more offense to the cause of Christ in this regard than the charismatic movement. The charismatic movement is seeking to authenticate its message through the

reintroduction of apostolic signs and wonders. After all, were they not used to introduce the New Covenant in the first place?

The problem is this: Those external (and I put the emphasis on that word external) signs and wonders served only a limited and short term purpose. Their purpose was to draw the attention of the Jewish people to the New Covenant. The Jewish people knew that signs and wonders would be associated with change in God's economy. But those signs were only temporary and only for the Jews. The New Covenant, itself with its internal phenomena is, according to Paul, what authenticates its message.

Paul does *not* say that the New Covenant is authenticated by signs and wonders, but rather, it is authenticated by the Shekinah glory associated with it and the transforming power of that glory which we taught about in our last study.

The charismatics must not pass this issue off with a wave of the hand. They have had to rely on much deception and craftiness in order to carry on their charade. There is a fundamental question of integrity at the core of this discussion. They do not raise men from the dead. They do not heal twisted limbs. They practice their art only where they cannot be easily exposed.

The tragedy is this, while they draw attention away with their signs and wonders charades, they obscure the light of the true New Covenant. Negatively, then we do not need craftiness.

2. Positively, Paul says, instead of handling God's Word with deceit and craftiness, we do it rather,

*by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*  
(AV)

The nature of the product determines the nature of its distribution. If we are offering truth and light we need to be truthful and transparent in its presentation. That is only consistent. Observe the words, *in the sight of God*. We may just as rightfully render them in the presence of God. The New Covenant is properly expressed by the believer who lives his life, his whole life, in the presence of God.

As we encounter verse 5, there is, now, a shift in Paul's emphasis that must not go unnoticed. I have said that chapter three emphasizes:

### **I. The Phenomenal Nature of the New Covenant**

In it, we stressed the phenomena or *significant* nature of the New Covenant. In a word, the phenomenon surrounds the Shekinah glory which, in turn, bespeaks the authenticating presence of God.

We must now, shift a few degrees in order to stress another aspect of the New Covenant. We must stress:

### **II. The Messianic Nature of the New Covenant**

This is Messiah's covenant, and this is important. It is the controlling ingredient in the application of this covenant.

*2Co 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: (AV)*

In our previous study we talked about Moses and the glory which shone on his face from being in the presence of the living God. We noted that it was a fading glory. We talked about how Moses veiled his own face to hide the fact that the glory of the first covenant was a fading glory. We then talked about how we ourselves can veil the glory of this gospel, this New Covenant.

But here, in verse 3, the word veil occurs again in the Greek. The translators would have done well to leave it that way so that we could understand the Holy Spirit's intent. So, let's read it again:

*2Co 4:3 But if our gospel be veiled, it is veiled to them that are lost: (AV)*

When I preach the gospel, only a small percentage of those who hear it from my voice truly receive Christ. And I am in no small company. When the Lord Jesus Christ, (the giver of this New Covenant) preached the gospel relatively few were truly converted.

Verse 4 explains why this is true:

*2Co 4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (AV)*

We have seen that the veil can be on the part of the minister. Now, we see that the intended recipient can also have his eyes veiled. More importantly, we see that Satan, the god of this world, is actively involved in the process of blinding men to the truth of this gospel. That is his intent. That is his purpose. That is his life goal.

Every day, in thousands of ways, he sends forth his hosts with their respective messages and doctrines, blinding men to the truth in a relentless effort to confuse the issues of truth and lie, and light and darkness. We are in the throes of a tremendous contest. The stranger who walks in on such discussion as this among believers is usually dumbfounded. Are there really people, he asks, who believe that such a contest is going on? Are there folks so gullible as to think that such a war between light and darkness is really going on? Whatever is this contest about? Who are the participants? Look at the verse again:

*2Co 4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (AV)*

1. The *enemy* is Satan, the god of this world.
2. The *tactic* is to blind the minds of those who believe not.
3. The *reason* is to prevent the *light* of the gospel to be *beamed* unto them.
4. It *is* the gospel.
5. It is the gospel of *Messiah*
6. The gospel is the gospel of Messiah who is the *image of God*.

Holding these thoughts in mind, notice the last two verses of the study, verses 5 and 6, and keep this theme of Messiah's gospel of light in front of you:

*2Co 4:5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to [give] the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (AV)*

We have just heard an earful.

1. There *is* a contest going on. It does not matter whether you *think* it *should* be going on or not. It does not matter whether you *want* it to be going on our not.
2. It is a battle between *light* and *darkness*. It is not the battle between light and darkness as defined by Zoroastrianism. It is not the battle between light and darkness as defined in the dualism proposed by the Star Wars series, where light and darkness are two sides of the same force.
3. The focal point of *this* battle surrounds a person called Messiah, or Christ.

There are some who feel that this very contest is represented from the get go. They feel it is prophetically symbolized in those very first words of Genesis when God said "Let there be light!" No one should dispute that fact for a second. Someone has said: "In the beginning God separated the light from the darkness and man has been trying to put the two back together ever since." There is truth in the fact that this contest of light and darkness is represented right in Genesis chapter one. But, *is* that what the passage is saying here? I don't think so. I think Paul is arguing concerning this Messiah Jesus who is the image of God, the icon of Elohim. Regarding those words:

*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness...*

Colin Kruse argues that the proper rendering of this phrase should be:

*For it is the God who said 'a light shall shine out of darkness.'*

Note the future tense, a light shall shine out of darkness. Paul was not quoting Genesis one here, Paul was quoting the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the coming Messiah, the one whom we call Jesus Christ.

Consider Isaiah 9:2: speaking of the dimness of Zebulun and Naphtali, Isaiah prophecies about a coming day:

*Isa 9: 2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. (AV)*

Again, Matthew 4:15-16 exhibits the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus Messiah:

*Mt 4:15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, [by] the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; 16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. (AV)*

This was *the light*, the Light to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. As Simeon so declared, this was the prophesied light of Messiah. The Messiah who is elsewhere prophesied as the light to the nations. Jesus Himself said:

*Joh 8:12 ... , I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (AV)*

And again in John 12:

*Joh 12:46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. (AV)*

We ask the question, what are we to make of this? Either you are in the dark or you are walking in the light. The light of which we speak is the light of the gospel, the light of the new covenant.

When folks come to me and start playing their mind games it soon becomes evident what the problem really is. When someone says, "With all the world's religions which are out there, how can you be so arrogant as to think *you* are really right, and the rest of the world is all wrong?" Or, "With all those contradictions and myths which are in the Bible, no intelligent, thinking 20th century person could possibly believe it is inspired!" I have good answers for those questions. But, in my heart I know the real issue. I know the light of the glorious gospel of Christ has not yet radiated into their hearts, because once a man truly comes to know Christ the *lights* come on! The difference between night and day is so brilliant that all the other also-ran religions on the face of the earth, religions which can only feed and thrive in darkness, are exposed in one fell swoop in the presence of the glory of the living Christ.

We do not offer a religion, we offer a Savior who will change you from the inside out, One who will transform and transfigure you. We offer a Savior who will take you from darkness into light, the light of the glorious gospel of the glorious Christ. Are you ready to take the step?

## New Covenant Dynamics - Part II

**Intro:** One of the pleasant surprises in my boyhood came on the day when I discovered I could ride my bicycle with no hands. It was a trial of sorts that uncovered this latent talent. I was riding home with a cabbage, I believe, in one hand while I held the handlebar with the other. The hand and arm holding the cabbage became tired and I felt the need to switch the cabbage from one hand to the other. Rather than stopping my bike, I steadied myself, let go of the handlebar, tossed the cabbage from one hand to the other, and grabbed the handlebar with the other hand. Much to my surprise, the bike did quite well on its own. I immediately decided to try this stunt again, letting the handlebar go unattended for a longer period of time.

I had learned an interesting principle that day. There were laws of motion and gravity at play which could be used to my advantage. They had been there all along but I had never taken advantage of them. Importantly, I had to *go against my nature* in order to experience these laws.

That is very much the way it is with the New Covenant. Folks are often not aware of the dynamics which are at their very finger tips, spiritual laws, which, for some Christians, go virtually untapped for much of their Christian walk. In our previous study, we taught you how to ride the bike, so to speak. We explained that it is the *practical enjoyment* of the *presence of Christ* which sheds the New Covenant light abroad in our lives. The world needs to see Christ in us. Now, we want to move a step further and talk about the "no hands" part of bicycle riding. In order to do this we will emphasize four characteristics of the New Covenant. Respectively, we'll see:

### **The Paradoxical Nature of the New Covenant** **The Sacrificial Nature of the New Covenant** **The Productive Nature of the New Covenant**

#### **I. The Paradoxical Nature of the New Covenant**

A paradox is an apparent contradiction. It is a very obvious paradox because we have just been taught about the wonderful superiority of the New Covenant, how that it's ministry outclasses in the Old Covenant every way, the Old Covenant that was the basis of Jewish hope.

What we may not see is what a humiliating blow this Covenant delivered to Judaism. The source of all their pride, their personal pride, their national pride and their racial pride can be traced to the giving of that Covenant, a covenant which Paul now claims has now been abolished. The source of Jewish bragging was being eliminated.

If the Jews had had previous reason to brag, we who have the administration of the New Covenant entrusted to we have ten thousand more reasons to brag. And, that is *exactly* the thing which God hates. He hates bragging. He hates boasting. He hates it because He alone is worthy of praise and glory. Only God deserves that kind of glory.

So, how do we take this fire of the New Covenant into our bosom and not be burned by it? How can we be the ministers of such a powerful covenant and not destroy ourselves with our own arrogance? How can we be the chosen vessels through which this New Covenant is ministered and not take on the dread "God and me syndrome" which humbler men than us have fallen victim to? How can we handle this hot potato of the New Covenant and, not become proud? The Answer lies in the *paradox* which we discover in verses 7-11:

*2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. 8 [We are] troubled on every side, yet not distressed; [we are] perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. 11 For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. (AV)*

Power like this, glory like this, deserves better. Recently we argued that the nature of the *product* determines the nature of its distribution. We said that hawking this gospel is like selling luxury homes on the back lot of a flea market. We do not entrust the administration of this precious gospel to carnies!

But, therein lies the problem, for we are all carnies and hucksters by nature. None of us, in ourselves, are qualified to represent this covenant in any way. When we seem to have the slightest success in so doing, we become arrogant and proud. We need a solution for our proud spirits. We find it in the fact that God has put this treasure in earthen vessels.

- It may be that Paul was making a reference to the story of Gideon at this point. He was the man who was specifically instructed by God to drastically reduce the numbers in his army. We read in Judges 2:7:

*Jud 7:2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that [are] with thee [are] too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. (AV)*

In this particular story, the greatly outnumbered Israelites surround the Midianites with torches which have pottery placed over them. When Gideon called out "The Sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" the vessels were all broken at once, providing the element of surprise. The Midianites arose out of their sleep thinking themselves greatly outnumbered and began slaying one another in their great confusion.

This *may be what Paul is referring to here* the breaking of the earthen vessels. This may be the simple lesson, lest we vaunt ourselves up and announce that *we have served God by our own hand*. That is one possibility.

- Or the answer may be even simpler than that. When Paul announced that we have this treasure in earthen vessels he may have just been referring to the common clay lanterns which were all around. These inexpensive, disposable, clay lamps were at every marketplace. They were brittle, easily broken, and constantly being replaced. There really wasn't much beauty in them. The beauty was in the light which was given off through their use.

And that is the paradox of this covenant, it destroys the administrator. When one stops to think about it, it really *is* the only way that God can manifest His life in human flesh. And so we read:



Troubled...yet not distressed.  
Perplexed...but not in despair.  
Persecuted....but not forsaken.  
Cast down...but not destroyed.

Why *wouldn't* we be distressed? Why wouldn't we despair? Why wouldn't we feel forsaken and devastated? When the world gets in to this kind of position it gets angry. Unbelievers shake their fists at God as though he has robbed them of something which is rightfully theirs! The *believer* knows better. He knows that in his *dying* is life.

Unbelievers often take wild and crazy chances and when they are asked, *why did you do such a crazy thing?* They reply, *I just need to feel like I was alive!* The Christian, on the other hand, feels most alive when he is most dying. His life is in his death.

However, the analogy is very much like that no-handed bike ride we spoke of earlier. You *have to go against your nature* to experience these laws! We who make it such a priority to avoid persecution and trials of any and every kind are really the zombies who do not experience life. When the world says *you cannot truly enjoy life until you are willing to die* they do not know what they are saying. Only a Christian can rightfully say such a thing. For us, the *life of Christ* is manifest in our dying.

So then, the first thing we have seen is the paradoxical nature of the New Covenant. To live, we must die. God will have it no other way.

Notice secondly:

## II. The Sacrificial Nature of the New Covenant

Start with verse 12.

*2Co 4:12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you. 13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; 13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; 14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present [us] with you. 15 For all things [are] for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. (AV)*

When Paul announces: So then death worketh in us, but life in you, it is sometimes seen as a rebuke to the Corinthians, and, surely, there must be some element of rebuke in it. These Corinthians have been acting like teenagers who have been enjoying the luxury of criticizing those who have provided everything for them, including their very existence, all the while contributing little or nothing themselves.

When one encounters the fantasy world of early high schoolers he discovers that they all think they will be driving "Beamers" in a few years and the world will be an entirely different place when they finally take control. Fortunately, about the time they graduate from high school they begin seeing the world through a different, more responsible set of glasses.

We may say that Paul was rebuking these spiritually adolescent Corinthians. But, more directly, I would rather believe that he is modeling, for these spiritual upstarts, what the goal of true ministry is all about.

Every little baby who comes into the world thinks the world revolves around him. Little by little we try to strip those impressions away from him. Finally, the day comes when we see that we were really placed here to be a source of blessing to others, not the object of blessing

So it is with new believers who really do think the spiritual world revolves around them! They think that a church should be chosen based on its music, or its contemporary expression, or whatever criterion is on the mind at the moment. They do not understand that the purpose of church is the application of the New Covenant, a *sacrificial* application. We come together, *not* to plan how to build new buildings, as important as they are at times, we come together to plan how we can die. We come together to plan how we can sacrifice and how we can give ourselves in ministry to the newbies coming up behind us. We want to set an example for them as our fathers set for us.

We want to teach them how to die, not how to live! And when we fail to communicate this dynamic we produce rice Christians, cosmetic Christians, and stony ground Christians who add up to very little. Such Christians are sterilized hybrids. Everything, everything in the world, hangs on our ability to bring to believer to the point of maturity where he sees that he lives when he dies and he dies for those who have not yet matured to this place of spiritual understanding.

The question is this: How can we bring ourselves to the point of sacrifice and be willing to endure the ongoing struggle and affliction which this sacrifice demands? Glance over verses 12-15 again. We understood the first part, "*So then, death worketh in us, but life in you..*" We understand that this is a *sacrificial* process. But we must also grasp the rest of the intent of Paul in verses 13 and 14:

*2Co 4:13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; (AV) 2Co 4:14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present [us] with you. (AV)*

There is only *one thing* that can motivate us to welcome such a high level of sacrifice. It is in the kind of *faith* that can see all the way into eternity.

Whatever does he mean with those words, we then having the *same* spirit of faith? The same as what? We believe Paul is saying that we have the same spirit of faith that the Psalmist demonstrated in his time of trial. An example of this is in Psalm 116, vs. 8-10.

*Ps 116:8 For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, [and] my feet from falling. 9 I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. 10 I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: (AV)*

We cannot find enough purpose in the kind of sacrifice which the New Covenant demands of us unless we can, with the eyes of faith, look forward, *all the way* to eternity.

Let me illustrate it this way. My first real computer was an Osborne. Its processing chip had 29,000 transistors in it. It cost \$1,800 and that was a deal. That was a sacrifice. Later I gave it away to a missionary. Today, that same \$1,800 will buy a computer no less than 10 million transistors in it. Today, if I owned that Osborne I would be too embarrassed to give it to a missionary.

What is the point? Now, that I am in the future, that little Osborne computer which I dearly loved, seems like a worthless piece of trash. When you and I are in eternity, the value, the purpose, of our sacrifices will finally be made known.

Why, was Paul making all this sacrifice? In his words, he was looking forward to the day when there would be a grand presentation day when the Father, the One who raised up the Lord Jesus, the firstfruits, would also raise all of us up. That single hour; that single point in time will make all the suffering worthwhile. In fact, it will do more than that, it will trivialize it. And, the things which had value now will seem so foolish then!

Look also at the third aspect and see:

### **III. The Productive Nature of the New Covenant**

#### **A. Its all you need right now. Verse 16.**

*2Co 4:16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward [man] is renewed day by day. (AV)*

Once again we're back to that word faint which we discussed earlier. Seeing we have this ministry we faint not. The strength comes not from within us, but from the indwelling Holy Spirit. We do not need to worry. Though the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day. How is he renewed? He is renewed by enjoying the presence of Christ.

#### **B. The New Covenant is all you need to prepare you for eternity. Verses 17 and 18:**

*2Co 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding [and] eternal weight of glory:18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen [are] temporal; but the things which are not seen [are] eternal. (AV)*

If you can touch it, if you can feel it, if you can taste it, if you can smell it, *if you can see it*, it will be destroyed. It has no value in eternity. There is no wormhole between here and heaven whereby your earthly goods may be transported to heaven. Plant your treasures and tools for the next life alongside your mummified body if you must, but they will remain only to be destroyed in that final hour. Only the New Covenant can give us this kind of eternal perspective which forces to re-value all of life's pursuits.

## Moving Day

Intro: Speaking of that great cloud of witnesses which have gone on before us, the author of Hebrews announces:

*Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of [them], and embraced [them], and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (AV)*

In the words of the gospel song writer:

*This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through,  
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue,  
The angels beckon me, from Heaven's open door,  
And I can't feel at home, in this world anymore.*

It is not the angels who are beckoning us in the text before us, it is the Apostle Paul who is whetting in our souls the appetite for something better, the realization of the certain hope which lies within every believer. It is hope, hope expressed in contrast to the light affliction which we are now experiencing. It is a better hope, it is a healthy hope, and it is a certain hope that we cherish.

Begin with 2 Corinthians 5:1 and notice that

### I. We Have a Better Hope

*1 ¶ For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

The very moment any passage anywhere in the Word of God turns to the discussion of heaven's glory we find a most interesting occurrence. We discover that the language and vocabulary of God's Word always becomes figurative and poetic. This is because of the problem that we have with words.

Words are important to God. They are extremely important. He does not cotton to us changing and playing with His Words. This New Living Translation that is coming out is a dead translation, in my estimation, because of the terrible freedoms it takes with God's Word. Do not err, then, concerning the importance of words. But remember, at the same time, human words are finite. They are temporal. At best, words can only describe knowledge that already exists.

We are now viewing over the fence into eternity itself. Words will put us on the step stool, but in the final analysis, they serve very poorly to describe the realities of our coming hope and the glories of eternity. For this reason, Paul resorts to metaphors and figures in the verses which lie ahead of us instead of relying on direct statements. He expects us to fill in some of the color in our minds.

The subject under discussion is our present earthly bodies and their future counterparts, our coming heavenly bodies. In this verse, Paul argues that our future, eternal bodies will be far superior to our present earthly bodies. There are at least three reasons found in this verse while this will be true.

First, we see, we have the right Builder. In contrast to these tents in which we now live we have waiting for us in heaven buildings made by God. We see also that we have the right building materials. This building of God is not made with hands. It is eternal. Things which are made by hands are always temporal. You may be thinking to yourself, this universe was not made with hands and it certainly is not eternal. And you are certainly correct. It was created to become obsolete. It was created to wax old. But that was by God's intent. Like our bodies, the universe is a temporary construction to accomplish a temporary purpose. The new heavens and the new earth, however will be eternal. The natural laws which govern them will not be the laws which govern us now.

We must stay with the subject; our heavenly bodies will be eternal in nature.

So, we have the right Builder, God Himself. We have the right materials, they will last for eternity. Our plumbing and wiring will not, thankfully, go bad in our eternal home. We will never need to be re-roofed, painted, or remodeled. Finally, we have the right location. It is eternal, in the heavens. This is not to say that we will not have access to the new earth.

We have said that we have a better hope. We will be moving into a new home made by the Right Builder, using the right materials, and built in the right location. Now, see:

## II. We Have a Healthy Hope

It is good and wise and right to desire not only to be with the Lord, the ultimate desire of every believer, but to move into our new homes, our new bodies. First, we see:

### A. It is a Passionate Desire

*2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:*

Why shouldn't we desire our new bodies? There is nothing selfish about that! One summer my wife and I took the long way home to Sacramento from where we had been in Salt Lake City. Somehow the car insisted on going north instead of west and about 2,000 miles later we found ourselves camping in a \$60 Sears tent on the Oregon coast. That night we encountered a rain storm. My wife loves sleeping in a tent in the rain. She thinks it's romantic. My wife does not like sleeping in the rain which is in the tent, however. I was not so particular, because my side of the tent was dry. We not only *desired* better accommodations for the next night, we found them.

For some of us, our tents haven't started leaking yet, and we are still quite satisfied. This is mostly, because we have not thought much on our heavenly bodies. For some of us, we are not groaning for our new home because we have not endured any bad weather in our tents. We have not stood for the cause of Christ and we have not shared the offense of the cross, the persecution, the embarrassment. We dare not to even give out a gospel tract!

Our point is that it is OK to wish we were in our new bodies! It is a *passionate desire!* Secondly,

## **B. It is a Proper Desire.**

You will need to look at verse 3 to appreciate this thought:

*3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.*

As soon as pastors start talking about nakedness from the pulpit everyone gets nervous. My family always worries that I will tell my joke about the mosquito in the nudist colony again. That is because there is something in our natures which make us uncomfortable about it. Nudists say we are repressed. Nudists think that only Christians with dirty minds would forbid nudism. We want to make it clear up front, sex isn't the only issue involved in the discussion of nudism, though it is a significant one. The Bible clearly associates public nakedness with shame. It is not natural to run around doing your grocery shopping naked. It makes one feel very vulnerable. It's a very risky thing to do, especially around smokers and the like. There is an element in nudism that transcends the issue of sexuality that is the element of shame.

What is Paul's point? Paul is drawing an important parallel here. Paul is assuming a *natural discomfort* with public nakedness and he says the natural discomfort one feels with public nakedness is the same kind of discomfort that would be experienced if the spirit were required to exist without a body. The body, according to Paul, is associated with clothing for the Spirit. God, of course, is clothed too. He is clothed in light.

Now, there is a mountain of theology in this short little verse and we will only scale it for a few feet but you need to spot its importance. When Paul says that it is proper to desire a spiritual body and that it is shameful for a spirit to go unclothed without a body he chops the false cultists off right at the knees! This was a body slam to the Gnostics.

Take, for example, the modern cultists who call themselves Jehovah's Witnesses. Christian scholars often call them Arians, identifying them with the ancient Christian heresy of Arianism which denies the deity of Christ. And, we may rightfully say that Jehovah's Witnesses are Arians. But, in truth, Jehovah's *False* Witnesses are Arians because they are first Gnostics. J.W's are simply a Gnostic sect which uses a millennial platform to spread its error.

The Gnostic sees matter as evil and spirit as good. Effectively, then, because Christ had a body He could not be God. The issue is not so much the issue of the plurality of the persons in the Godhead as it is the issue of bodies and spirits. Christ could not be God because he had a body! This is why these false witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. This is why they deny His bodily return! Flesh, any kind of flesh, is perceived to be evil in the Gnostic eye of the witness. It is at this very point where Jehovah's Witnesses fall all over each other contradicting themselves. They have opened such a contradictory Pandora's Box that even they themselves cannot hold a consistent position.

The desire to have a resurrection body is *proper*. It is appropriate that our spirits do not go unclothed without a body. Then, in order to adjust our attitudes properly, we need to see what Paul is saying in verse four. Using my personal choice of words, Paul is saying:

## **C. It is a Positive Desire (Not negative.)**

4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

Why do we groan in this tabernacle? Is this tabernacle essentially bad or evil? No, it is simply a burden. Now, underscore that second phrase:

*...not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon*

It is *not* that we want to be free from our earthly bodies, for then we would be disembodied spirits! Our desire is not negative; it is not to be free of *any* body. Our desire is *positive*; we want to be further clothed in our immortal bodies.

This is a good time to notice what Paul does *not* seem to address the issue directly. The issue with which we struggle is this: When does this all occur?

We have two questions which must be answered in order:

1. When a believer dies we know he goes immediately into the presence of Christ. Verse 8 tells us so. But does he immediately receive his eternal body? The one which Paul speaks of here? The answer is clearly, NO! And the reason is as plain as the noses on our faces. If the dead received their glorified bodies at the time of their death there would be no need for a resurrection of any sort! The dead in Christ would not need to rise first. They would already have their glorified bodies. 1 Corinthians 15 makes it clear that the seed of the corruptible is raised incorruptible. This leads us automatically to question #2.

2. What about the dead who are in Christ at this very moment? Do they have bodies?

The answer is, they do. They have some kind of temporary body to carry them through to the resurrection, though we admit that we do “see through a glass darkly” on the subject. It is a body which is neither earthly, like ours, nor incorruptible, like the resurrection body will be. How do we know this?

a.) God would not shame his own by having them go around unclothed (without a body) until the resurrection. You were not a disembodied spirit before you came to earth and you will never be one.

b.) God did not do this to His Old Testament saints. The rich man, Lazarus, and Abraham all have bodies according to Luke 16. It is very difficult to drop water on the tongue of a spirit, or to rest in the bosom of a spirit.

c.) Moses and Elijah appeared with bodies, not as spirits at the Transfiguration, and talked with the disciples. The disciples did not perceive them to be spirits.

d.) The martyred tribulation saints are seen with bodies before their resurrection. Look at Revelation 6: Are the physical souls to be stored somewhere under an altar such as some incorrectly read from Revelation 6:9?

Re 6:9 ¶ And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: (AV)

The Bible uses the term soul to represent folks who are in bodies, such as the souls which were saved from the shipwreck in Acts or the 8 souls which were saved by water in 1 Peter 3:20, or the souls which reign for a thousand years with Christ in Revelation 3:20. They all have bodies fully attached. Furthermore, verse 10 of Revelation 6 says:

*Re 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? (AV)*

One needs a voice box to cry with a loud voice. These saints have gathered at the appropriate place where justice is reconciled and here, from beneath the altar, they make their rightful claim for vindication. Verse 11 makes it even more clear:

*Re 6:11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they [were], should be fulfilled. (AV)*

Everything in scripture points to the fact that the believer who dies in Christ receives some kind of temporary body for use until the resurrection. The Bible makes no big deal of it because it is the resurrection body, the eternal body, which is the important one to us. That is the body which will be the humdinger.

So, we see that we have a better hope, and we have a healthy hope. We will soon continue discussing our certain hope. For now, we ask the third question, the final question: What about the unbelieving dead?

We have, in fact, already answered that as well. It is clear to us, based upon Luke 16, which we have already noted, that immediate death for the unbeliever represents immediate torment. They too, have temporary bodies. Else, why would the Lord Jesus quote the rich man in Hades when he said:

*Lu 16:23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. (AV)*

Either the Lord Jesus was a great deceiver and a liar, or He taught that there was a rich man, a man named Abraham, a man named Lazarus, a place called Hades, and the torment of real flames on real bodies. This is no fun to talk about these things. There is no rest, no respite for the wicked.

It may be that there are disembodied spirits who do not have access to bodies of any sort, but they are the fallen spirits of the demon world. One glimpse into this likelihood is found in another story surrounding the life of Christ. It is the story of the legion of demons who indwelt demon possessed man. Concerning these demons, the Bible says, according to Luke 8:31:

*Lu 8:31 And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. 32 And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. 33 Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. (AV)*



They did not want to return to the abyss, the deep. They chose rather, the bodies of swine, than to be in a disembodied state in the abyss. Whatever the condition, we know that to be disembodied is a state that even the demons reel away from in fear.

There is nothing funny about ghosts, demons, and hell. All the candy in the world, given out on Halloween night will not sugar coat the hellishness of the truth that there *are* eternal realities. There is a coming day of death for all men and there is a physical existence yet to come. Is your hope found in verse 8? Can you say with Paul:

*2Co 5:8 We are confident, [I say], and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (AV)*

You *can* say that with confidence. That is the stuff of the next study. You *can* make that statement with confidence. But, unbelieving friend you would do well not to wait for the next chapter. If God is dealing with you concerning the matter of your soul, today, the Bible says TODAY is the day of salvation for you!

## Judgment Day

Intro: While directing your attention to the passage which gripped our imagination in the last chapter, I would like to keep my promise and supply the third of my three points. Speaking in the context of our coming resurrection and our resurrection bodies in 2 Corinthians 5, verses 1-8 we have already seen:

We have a better hope. We have the right builder, a building made of God. We have the right materials, the building is eternal. It is in the right location, in the heavens.

We saw, secondly, that we have a healthy hope. Our desire is a passionate desire as we groan for this day of transition from corruptible to incorruptible. Our desire is a proper desire. It is appropriate that we do not think of our spirits as going around unclothed, without a body. Finally, it is a positive desire, not a negative one. Verse 4 teaches us that it is not because we do not want a body, but rather, this desire is because we desire a *better* body.

We then took a little side trip and showed you from God's Word why we teach that the dead have temporary bodies or tabernacles which will keep them in good stead until the resurrection..

Now, let's advance to the third aspect of this study. We have:

### III. A Certain Hope

Beginning with verse 5 we read:

*2Co 5:5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing [is] God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.*

*6 Therefore [we are] always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: 7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) 8 We are confident, [I say], and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (AV)*

#### A. The Source of this Hope is God the Father.

According to verse 5, we read: "Now he that hath wrought us for the very same thing is God..." God formed us, or fashioned us, or prepared us for this very hour. In "eternity past" it was decided by God that we would be allowed to experience corruption before we would be allowed to experience incorruption. It is part of the heavenly plan. It is actually a marvelous plan which demands much more of our attention as we learn how we are God's poems. We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, according to Ephesians 2:10.

The point of the moment is that we can be certain of this hope, because its *source* is in God the Father. Then notice:

#### B. The Evidence of this Hope is the Holy Spirit.

*5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing [is] God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.*

You have heard it appropriately taught that the Holy Spirit is the down payment so-to-speak, on our finished redemption. The world, you see, will continue looking for proof of the workings of God until doomsday. The believer has long since had the witness of the Holy Spirit in His heart. He knows now, He understands now, that there is an additional data source beyond the five senses and it does not originate in the world of the parapsychological. This new source is from the world of the Holy Spirit.

Just as surely as a chicken knows how to peck, and just as instinctively as a dog knows how to bark we know there is a coming resurrection because the very evidence of the working of God's Spirit in our hearts argues for it. Thirdly, while we know this hope is certain as a result of the earnest of the Spirit, we must always remember:

### **C. The Expression of this Hope is by Faith.**

We, as believers, laid hold on this truth by faith and then found its substance and reality. This is not just any faith, but faith in what God said. Paul reminds us that we approach *all* of life this way:

*6 Therefore [we are] always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: 7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) 8 We are confident, [I say], and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (AV)*

This is not the blind faith that the world tries to depict. This is not foolish faith, based upon some charlatan leader who rises and falls as our next messiah in a ceaseless progression of wannabe's. This is certain faith because it is based upon the right object. It is based upon the gold standard of God's Word. We *know* it will happen. And, we look forward to it with great joy.

Now, let's get to the fourth point.

### **D. The Focus of this Hope is in Christ.**

*We are confident, [I say], and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (AV)*

Paul is making one point unmistakably clear. This hope for a new and incorruptible body would have no meaning if it were not connected with the Person of Christ himself. You see, eternal life would be hell and you would not want it if it just meant eternal existence. Again, this is the point which the world misses totally!

Very often some Romeo commits suicide in this world because he cannot have his Juliet. We understand that pathos. We understand the error in such logic, but every community has its lovers' leap, that place where two unfulfilled lovers choose death rather than existence without each other.

I am not making fun of them when I tell you that you need a much stronger reason than even the love of Romeo and Juliet to make the thought of living for eternity beautiful. You need a very beautiful Person to make that thought beautiful. *This* is the ultimate reason why we desire a glorified, resurrected body. It signals our reunion and union with the great lover of our souls, Jesus Christ! Not even the disciples who walked with Christ could understand what this coming union with Christ would be like, when the veil of the flesh would be stripped away! You can believe God. It will take eternity in your resurrection body to appreciate it!

When I was a child I would read passages such as Revelation 3:12:

*Re 3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, [which is] new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and [I will write upon him] my new name. (AV)*

I would wonder who would like the job of being a temple pillar. Now, we know that Christ is speaking figuratively here, but we also need to know that we will be so drawn to the living Christ that we would, if we could, be privileged to be a temple pillar, just to be near Him! What a romance! We will never drink enough from His face and eyes! We will never tire of His fellowship! We will never yawn in His presence! Like devoted lovers we will dote over Him. When Marx said that religion is the opiate of the soul he was not entirely wrong, just totally mistaken! There is no experience on earth that can even be used to intimate what unspeakable exhilaration awaits; an exhilaration that only a resurrection body can handle. It is an exhilaration which will come to us when we come into the presence of the living Christ! If we did not have new bodies we would all have coronaries!

As argued previously, we dare not peer too deeply into these matters or we would all be looking for Jack Kworkian! We would say, enough! Enough! And, we would cut our journeys in this Egyptian dessert short!

Oh that will be, glory for me!  
Glory for me, glory for me!  
When by His grace, I shall look on His face!  
That will be glory! Be glory for me!

This truly is a glorious hope! To depart and be with Christ is always far better. But we are not finished yet. We are not finished yet here on earth, and we are not yet finished with our text and with our meditation on this certain hope! The source of this hope is God. The evidence of this hope is the Holy Spirit. The expression of this hope is by faith. The focus of this hope is in Christ. And, now:

### **E. The Purpose of this Hope is to Motivate Us.**

*2Co 5:9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things [done] in [his] body, according to that he hath done, whether [it be] good or bad. (AV)*

Hopefully, we'll be able to unravel some of the strange ideas regarding this passage which presently circulated in the body of Christ. Before we become involved in the intense discussion related to this passage we want to understand the *context* of the passage. We are discussing our hope, our confidence, and our joy. While we are chewing on the controversial issues arising out of this passage we must never lose the awareness that we *look forward* to the Judgment Seat of Christ with joy and enthusiasm, not with fear.

When we read of the terror or fear of the Lord in verse 11 you will clearly see that it is actually introducing the new subject of reconciliation. It is a transition and a link. When we see what kind of joy which is ours, and what kind of fear belongs to the unreconciled, we *must* be motivated to win the lost. Some Calvinists argue that we should never be motivated by the fact that the lost are going to hell and that we should only be motivated by obedience. I think I am a stronger Calvinist than many, and I think that teaching is wrong.

Keep this thought in mind as we open this challenging subject of the wonderful judgment seat of Christ. We look forward to it with hope and joy, not with fear. I believe I can prove that to you before we finish with this theme in the next chapter or so. At the moment, I only ask you to notice the context. We are talking about the great confidence we have that we will be ushered in before Christ.

I want to clean the kitchen cabinets. I want you to take everything out of the cabinet of your mind which you have ever held about the judgment seat of Christ, and put it on the kitchen counter so that you can rearrange the shelves. I want you to rethink the whole concept of the judgment seat of Christ.

Before we reload the shelves let's clean the cabinet. Let's wipe the shelves off. Then, in the next study we'll, (1) put on some new shelf paper, and, (2) reload the shelves. I want to give you a few things to consider. To begin, there is a thread that can be found in all of the judgment seat passages which usually goes unnoticed. It is a thread which will help us see it in its proper light. However, you will have to read into the next chapter to learn of it, though I certainly challenge you to find it on your own. It is very obvious, once you see it.

First, let's talk momentarily about

#### 1.) Things which are not true about the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Let's clean the shelves off. Let's do away with some dust and cobwebs which have accumulated in our thinking about the judgment seat of Christ. Let's do away with some Christian mythology. Be sure these myths do not appear in your cabinet. Here are some ideas which I have heard expressed for which I find *no* biblical basis:

a.) Our eternal state, heaven or hell, will be decided at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is the only logical conclusion an Arminian can make though we will not take time to argue that point right now. He has no other choice but to teach this whether he believes it or not. Clearly, if you believe you can lose your salvation then you must expand your idea of the judgment seat of Christ to include the determination of your eternal state. This is wrong for two reasons. First, the Bible says that the judgment of the Great White Throne, described in Revelation 20:11-15, is the place where the eternal destiny of the lost will be decided. If you are unsaved, stop right now; do not pass "Go." Look at this passage in Revelation 20:11.

More specifically, however, while speaking of the judgment seat of Christ, Paul informs us in 1 Corinthians 3:15 that this trial of our *works* will be by fire, and he says:

*1Co 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (AV)*

Most careful Bible students already understand this point, but we want to be sure to make it for the record. You see, the Bible tells us in Ephesians 1:6 that we have already been accepted *in* Christ. In this passage, we labor to be accepted *of* Christ. So, just wipe that idea clean off your shelf. Here's another myth:

#### 2. There will be no real accounting to speak of at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

One Bible expositor recently taught: "Since the Bema is an event that relates to the Church only, which has been raptured prior to the beginning of the Tribulation, there is no time for each saint to give an 'account' of all his or her works performed in the service of Christ." He then gets out his calculator determines a conservative estimate of how many Christians have ever lived, divides it by the available seconds in Daniel's 70th week and concludes that, at best we will each have only 11 seconds to give an account! He goes on to say "This is, of course, used to illustrate the nonsensical nature of the 'accounting' concept at the Bema."

How can we clarify this problem? To begin, the Bible says we will appear *for the purpose of giving an account*. The issue of enumerating (either sins or works) is never discussed in the scriptures, pro or con. Our word "accounting", however, implicitly assumes numeration. That is because of our English predisposition to this word in a mathematical sense. In the Greek, ( in my personal opinion) the proper word which Paul would have used if Paul was teaching that we believers would be listing our works would have been *logizomai*. That is the correct accounting term he likely would have used if he was suggesting a personal deed by deed self-evaluation. While that would have been the correct term, this accounting term is *never* used in reference to the Bema. Only the Greek logos is used. This implies that we will give an answer for our deeds not, necessarily, be required to make, or listen to, a list. But we *will* give an account:

*Ro 14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (AV)*

And, that accounting *will* relate to our works. We do not know, one way or the other, whether our deeds will be listed. As to the issue of time required for such a judgment, it does not appear to us that it took Adam a long time to name all the animals. His brain was not yet corrupted and your brain will be incorruptible. Processing time is not the issue as the aforementioned author suggested. Furthermore, you will not be inside the space/time continuum for this judgment and, in addition, it *could* take place *simultaneously* for all believers at a single point in time. Who knows? We are not really informed about the mechanics of the process. My only point is this: - do not try to diminish the fact that you *will* give an account for all the works done in your body, whether they are good or bad. Paul reminds us in Galatians 6:

*Ga 6:3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. 4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. (AV)*

Are you proving or testing the validity of your service for Christ? It is better that we test our works now than wait for the "big surprise!" That brings us to the next myth:

**3. Only our works will be judged at the Bema Seat.** Now, I know fully what folks intend when they say this, and, when properly understood, the statement is correct. It would be more biblically accurate to say that you will give an account *of yourself*, based upon the works done in your body. In truth your sins were judged at Calvary, if you know Christ. That is where God satisfied His wrath regarding them. You cannot pay for even one of them. It's all or nothing. If that is what Christians mean when they say only our works will be judged, we have no problem. But if one intends more by that statement, if one is trying to distance himself from this judgment by insisting that only our works will be judged, and we will not give an account of ourselves, he has crossed the line. Look carefully at verse 10 here and again, at Romans 14:10. You personally, will appear before this Bema, not your inanimate works. They will have already been tested by fire and you will give account of yourself to God for the result of that test of your works, whether good or bad. Don't try to weasel out of the accountability aspect of this judgment! We want this accountability. We need

this accountability. This accountability will not hurt or destroy us! It is a good thing that we will be judged, not a bad thing. In fact, that leads us to our next myth:

**4. You will suffer or rejoice for all eternity based upon the results of that Bema Seat judgment.** Only in your dreams! If that fact were true, the Bible would teach it somewhere and it does not. In fact, the Bible teaches the opposite. Notice exactly what the Bible says about the end of time and our entrance into the eternal state:

*Re 21:1 ¶ And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, [and be] their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. (AV)*

Now, these words are true and faithful. There will be no sorrow or discipline of any sort remaining for the eternal state. However, between the day of our resurrection and the end of time there remains at least another one thousand and seven years. I am of the personal persuasion that the millennium, the thousand years during which time saints will reign with Christ, will be a period of time during which those rewards or lack of rewards *will be very noticeable*. At the same time, I reject the extreme views of Dillow and Faust, some of which would have believers going through a virtual purgatory during the millennium! These views are based essentially on a misunderstanding of the overcomer passages in Revelation two and three. More importantly, those wonderful victors crowns or wreathes which we receive at the Bema will be for *Christ's* glory, not for our glory. Our glory will be in bringing glory to Christ. The sadness we will experience will relate, I am sure, to the awareness of how much more glory we could have brought to our Savior's name. [*Those who would like an in-depth discussion of these issues are invited to visit the [www.middletonbiblechurch.org](http://www.middletonbiblechurch.org) web site. Just key Dillow or Faust into the MBC search engine.*]

So far, all we have done is clean off the shelf and removed some persistent ideas which never seem to go away.

We still do not have the picture, the real picture of what the judgment seat of Christ is about. You will need to read into the next chapter for that discussion.

And unbeliever, please remember, whatever your image is of this coming Bema seat may be, it is pretty much irrelevant to you personally. Be careful, lest, in the words of Hebrews:

*Heb 10:26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. (AV)*

Flee from the wrath to come and flee into the open arms of a loving Savior who wants you to know Him today.

## The Bema Seat

Intro: We are rejoicing in the hope of our coming resurrection bodies and in the great confidence and joy the hope of the resurrection brings us. This joy is focused especially in the fact that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord Jesus Christ.

As ironic as it may sound, we have also been rejoicing in the coming Bema Seat, the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is a day we anticipate, not a day from which to shy away, cowering in fear. In fact, the whole purpose of the judgment seat of Christ, from our earthly perspective, is to motivate us to labor, a fact we will underscore in this study.

Using the analogy of cleaning the kitchen cabinets, we requested that we take everything out of the cabinets of our mind, so to speak, and place them on the kitchen counter so that you can reorganize our ideas about the judgment seat. We then decided to clean the cabinet before reorganizing it, so we did away with a few myths surrounding the judgment seat. We said that:

- 1. It is a myth to believe that our eternal state, heaven or hell, will be decided at the judgment seat of Christ.** Only believers appear at the judgment seat of Christ. Unbelievers look forward to the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11, and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
- 2. It is a myth to believe that there will be no real accountability at the judgment seat of Christ.** It will be a serious, sobering time and not just a tea party. Whether or not the deeds done in our body are individually listed, we will still give an account
- 3. It is a myth to believe that only our works will be judged.** That is, it is a myth to think one can distance himself from his personal responsibility for both the good and the bad deeds done in the body. Agathos, (good) or kakos, (bad), your deeds will be evaluated by fire. Your sins were judged at Calvary, but you yourself will give an account of yourself to God, according to Romans 14:12. You will be accountable, based on your works. Those works will be tried by fire.
- 4. It is a myth to believe you will suffer or rejoice for all eternity based upon the results of that Bema Seat.** It is precisely upon entry to the eternal state (According to Revelation 2:4) that *all* the former things will be forgotten.

Having cleaned off our imaginary shelf, let's proceed to place the biblical items on the shelf which relate to the Bema Seat. We will do so, by answering questions.

What Is the Bema Seat? Where Is it Discussed in God's Word? When Will it Occur? Who Will Participate In It?

### I. What is the Bema Seat?

According to Strong's concordance:



It is correctly pronounced: 968 bema {bay'-ma}

AV - judgment seat 10, throne 1, to set (one's) foot on + 4128 1; 12

- 1) a step, pace, the space which a foot covers, a foot-breath
- 2) a raised place mounted by steps
  - 2a) a platform, tribune
    - 2a1) of the official seat of a judge
    - 2a2) of the judgment seat of Christ
    - 2a3) Herod built a structure resembling a throne at Caesarea, from which he viewed the games and made speeches to the people

While we will not concern ourselves with technicalities, it is good to notice that it was actually a platform, set up for a tribunal who would pronounce legal judgments while resting on a seat or *sella* placed on the platform. Thus, at times, it served as much as a throne as it did a place of legal pronouncements. Herod, for example, built one in Caesarea, from which he viewed the games and made his speeches. In short, this was the seat of authority and was not necessarily bad or good in itself, as both punishment and rewards were handed out there.

## II. Where Is it Discussed in God's Word?

In the Bible, there are 12 references to Bema seats including both secular seats and the judgment seat of Christ. You may find them in passages such as Mat 27:19, John 19:13, Acts 7, 12, 18, and 25. It is generally held by Bible teachers that there are three Bema seat passages that especially concern us. We will look at each of them briefly, learning a different lesson from each passage.

### A. The Bema Seat as Mentioned in Romans 14.

There are two important facts to take from this passage, though more could be addressed. Paul is talking specifically about how we treat our brethren, especially the weak in the faith

*10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*

*11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.*

*12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

*13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.*

*14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*

*15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.*

*16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:*

*17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

*18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*

I said there were two key facts:

**1. Consider the *nature* of our judgment in Romans 14.** According to this passage, what, specifically will be judged at this seat?

According to verse 10, we are not to judge our brothers because we will all stand before the judgment seat (bema) of Christ. We see two *questions*; 1.) Why do we judge our brother, and 2.) Why do we set him at naught.

We see two *commands*; 1) Judge not anymore, and 2) Work rather, so as not to put a stumblingblock before him.

We are not in competition with each other as servants of Christ. We are not competitors. We each answer personally to the tribunal. So, you see, we *will* be judged for our treatment of the brethren.

## 2. Consider the *reason* for our judgment in Romans 14.

We are asking ourselves, why is this so important to God? Why is our treatment of the brethren such a strong matter that Paul directs us immediately to the judgment seat of Christ? Read verse 18 again.

*18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*

The word *acceptable* is a temple word, a priestly word. When we are called upon to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God in Romans 12:1 and 2, they are to be *acceptable* unto God. When we go out of our way not to judge the brethren; when we walk so as not to put a stumblingblock before them, it is a priestly act in the eyes of God. It is a sacrifice well pleasing unto him.

This same word is often translated well pleasing in our New Testaments. Consider Philippians 4:18

*Php 4:18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things [which were sent] from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. (AV)*

Every time you care for a brother in Christ, every time you lift him up, God views it as a priestly act, acceptable, and well pleasing unto God.

Therefore, the first Bema passage stresses our treatment of the brethren and we may rightfully say that God sees such good treatment as an acceptable sacrifice. Now, we move along to the second Bema Seat reference in 1 Corinthians 3:9-17

*9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.  
10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.  
11 ¶ For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.  
12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;  
13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.  
14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.  
15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.  
16 ¶ Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?  
17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*

While the word Bema is not specifically mentioned in this passage, there is no doubt in anyone's mind that Paul is talking about it. Again, we limit ourselves to two thoughts.

**1. Consider the *nature* of our judgment in 1 Corinthians 3.** The first judgment has to do with how we treat the brethren. The second, has to do with our building practices, how we build God's temple.

This is no small matter. The Bible is not talking about our physical bodies here. That is not the temple under discussion at all. The Bible is talking about the whole body of Christ, how we nurture and disciple the body of Christ, His living temple! We cannot play games with Christ's church. The ministry is not a dog and pony show. It is not Entertainment Tonight. We are in the temple building business and the materials going into that temple will be tested. Your Sunday School teaching, my preaching and teaching, any and all of our ministry, is included in temple building. We will be scrutinized at the Bema regarding the purity of our work.

Dr. Ironside tells a story about G. Campbell Morgan in this regard. Morgan was a headmaster who left education in order to go into the ministry. Ironside says:

"...It was a very solemn moment when he was set apart to the work of the Lord, and when he got home that night and went into his room, he fell down on his knees before God, and he was sure he could hear the Lord saying to him, 'Now Morgan, you have been set apart definitely for the ministry of the Word. Do you want to be a great preacher or do you want to be My servant?' His first thought was, 'Oh I want to be a great preacher; surely there is no more laudable ambition than that.' But why should the Lord put it that way -- *Do you want to be a great preacher or a great servant?* And he said, 'Why can I not be His servant and a great preacher?' He went through a time of real soul-struggle and then the thought came that it might be in the will of God that as a servant of Christ his ministry should be a very obscure one, and he cried, 'O blessed Lord, I would rather be Thy servant than anything else!' And God not only made him His servant, but a great preacher."

Our goal is not to impress men. It is to impress God. It is not to be great preachers and teachers. It is to be great servants.

The *nature* of our judgment: How we build on Christ's temple, how we build and edify His church.

**2. Consider the *reason* for our judgment in 2 Corinthians 3.** It is a priestly matter. Our labor for the Lord is an offering. As New Covenant priests we are endowed with a higher level of blessing and a higher standard of accountability. We note sadly how few believers comprehend their priestly ministries in even the slightest sense.

Finally, we find ourselves back at this 2 Corinthians passage in chapter five. Here we see the third element of our judgment: First, it related to our treatment of the brethren. Secondly, it relates to our building on the temple,

Look specifically at verse 10 of 2 Corinthians 5:

*2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things [done] in [his] body, according to that he hath done, whether [it be] good or bad. (AV)*

**1. Consider the *nature* of our judgment in 2 Corinthians 5.** It will be with respect to things done in the body. Corruptible as they may be - they are only on loan to us from God.

Many of you know I am a renter. As a renter I am not responsible for normal wear and tear on the home in which I live. If the wind blows the roof off - it's not my problem. When I leave the house, however, there will be a time of accountability - a walk-through - so to speak.

When we leave these old bodies behind - there will be some answerability - for the deeds done in the flesh. Did we use these bodies for our own gratification or for the glory of God? Did we just spin our proverbial wheels?

Oh, and you need to see:

2. Consider the *reason* for our judgment in 2 Corinthians 5.

*2Co 5:9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. (AV)*

There it is again, that word *accepted*. This is the well-pleasing word. This is the sacrificial word. This is the priestly word.

So, in the words of Solomon, what is the conclusion of the matter? What is my point? The point is simply this: The Bema Seat, though similar to the earthly Bema Seats, is not the same because our Tribunal is a High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not a military exercise; it is a priestly exercise, a priestly accounting, and an accounting of our offering to Christ. These words are not written by Paul to put "the terror of the Lord" in our hearts as is assumed so often. These words are here to *motivate us to labor*.

Look at verse 9 again:

*2Co 5:9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. (AV)*

Focus on the word labor. It means we are ambitious, we strive, and we study to be accepted of Him, accepted in our priestly, sacrificial ministry. What you do for Christ *does* matter. Your sacrifice does not matter because you simply want the praise of God. We want every man to have the praise of God. We want every man to be to the praise of His glory. We labor to *be accepted* of Him. This acceptance is not in the sense of salvation. We are already accepted in the beloved according to Ephesians. No, we want our love offerings, our service, to be accepted.

We have a judgment because we need terminus, we need resolution, and we need accountability.

The worst employer I ever had was the worst employer because I never knew where I stood regarding the quality and quantity of my work. We need to know where we stand. If I are serving Christ today out of fear, fear of what will happen if I do not serve Him, I doubt whether my offering adds up to much of a sacrifice anyway.

If my service for Him is out of love, a loving, sacrificial offering, and I am serving Christ while properly treating the brethren, while properly building Christ's temple, and while properly using this body, I can be sure my service will be accepted of Him!

We have some additional "sticky" questions to deal with regarding this coming Bema seat. Who will be there? When will it take place, and so forth. What about our service for Christ and labor for Him after the Judgment seat? There are numerous things to consider, but for this study, we finish by showing you how to posture yourself for this coming hour. We find it in Luke 17:7

*Lu 17:7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? 8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? 9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*  
(AV)

Remember, you are the servant - not the Master. Remember, the Master is not even required to thank you.

Remember, in the final analysis, we are all unprofitable servants and anything we have ever done has been less than our duty!

Why, or how He has ever delighted in letting us offer priestly sacrifices of service and ministry to Him, we will never know, but this we do know, to despise this opportunity to provide an offering acceptable to God, is to despise a birthright far greater than Esau's.

## What Happens at the Bema? - II

Introduction:

We are looking at 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 11

*2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things [done] in [his] body, according to that he hath done, whether [it be] good or bad. 11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. (AV)*

We have asked ourselves:

- I. What Is the Bema Seat, and
- II. Where is it Discussed in God's Word?

We pointed to three key passages, which have to deal directly with the nature and reason for the Bema Seat. We have learned that we will be judged 1.) For our treatment of the brethren; 2.) For motives and the care we take in building God's temple; and, finally, 3.) For "...for things done in the body," our use of bodies. We must not think that, because we have disposable bodies which are susceptible to fleshly impulses that we will not be accountable for their sanctity and their use in service for Christ. We are not the landlords of our bodies. We are not the owners of our bodies. They belong to Christ and were purchased by Him at our redemption.

These are the easy questions to answer. We will address the last question only briefly before returning to the general treatment of our text.

### III. When Will The Bema Occur?

The first thing we need to understand is:

#### A. The Bible does not say when it will occur.

Therefore, we can only arrive at a logical suggestion as to when it will occur. Keep in mind that we are only offering intelligent suggestions concerning the timing of this event.

#### B. Most pre-tribulation rapturists hold that there is one Bema Seat and that it will occur immediately upon the rapture of the church.

1.) It is taught that the Bema will occur immediately after the rapture and before the 7-year tribulation as the result of a logical process that demands it. Those who hold this position argue that Revelation 4:10 requires it. In verses 10 and 11 we read:

*Re 4:10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, (AV) Re 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (AV)*

The point is these four and twenty elders *already* have their crowns, their victors crowns (these are not diadems, they are victors crowns) which are then cast before the throne of God. This event occurs ostensibly *before* the presentation of the seven sealed scroll and the inception of the tribulation events.

Logically, then, it seems that the judgment seat, the place where awards and crowns were passed out to the victorious, does occur before the tribulation, for those who are in Christ. That much we can say with authority. This passage says that the event must occur before the tribulation. The question remains, how much before?

2.) Does the possibility exist that every believer is judged regarding his works at the time of his death? After all, there is nothing that says that the Bema Seat must occur at a single point in time. The Bible says we must all appear before the seat it does not say we must all appear before the Bema at the same time. In other words, Christ could be seated at the right of God, not just for purposes of making intercession for us, but also for the purpose of presiding at the Bema for those who are departing to be with Christ. It would make sense that we could each one have our own time before this seat, our own "day," so to speak. This would solve a number of theological problems, especially the problem concerning timing, where we have to admit that the Bible does not specifically indicate a time for "the" Bema Seat as though it were a single event. To teach this view, on the other hand, would certainly ruin many dispensational charts!

There are two verses, in particular, however, which seem (at least in the English) to move against this conclusion.

a.) The first is found in 2 Timothy 4:1 where we read in the English that Christ shall judge the living and the dead at His appearing and his kingdom. We read:

*2Ti 4:1 ¶ I charge [thee] therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; (AV) [underline, mine]*

But, a closer look at the text reveals that our problem is with the English text. Paul is charging Timothy by the Lord Jesus Christ, and by His appearing and by His kingdom. Paul is citing, as the authority for his charge to Timothy, the appearing (the *epiphanea*) of Christ, His appearance in glory.

b.) Another interesting passage is found in 1 Peter 5: 3 and 4. It relates to the conduct of pastors or elders and it says:

*1Pe 5:3 Neither as being lords over [God's] heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (AV)*

Notice the wording, "...when the chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory." If we were to transliterate this directly from the text (as in the case of Berry's Interlinear) we would word it "and having been manifested, the chief shepherd, ye shall receive the unfading of glory crown." This means, that the unfading glory crown is to be presented *in connection* with the manifestation of Christ. At first, we would assume that this argues for the placement of a single event, called the Judgment Seat of Christ, directly in connection with the rapture or the appearance of Christ.

I must play the devil's advocate here, however, and argue that the word for manifest in this passage is not one of the three usual words which are used in reference to the *return* of Christ (*epiphanea*, *parousia*, and *apokalupsis*). Rather, it simply carries the idea of becoming known, or being made manifest. This word occurs many times in this context in the New Testament. It occurs right here in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 11 where we must all be *made manifest* before the judgment seat where we will be made manifest to God. We may rightfully read it when Christ is made known unto us, or made manifest. It *could* indicate that we will receive our crowns on the day we see Christ, not just on the day when He returns. The dead in Christ have been made manifest to Him already! While there is value in thinking on these things, the important fact is that we will be meeting our Savior in a day of accountability.

**This we know for certain:** Believers who are in Christ *will* be judged before (not during) the tribulation period. We base this on the fact that the four and twenty elders have received their crowns prior to the breaking of the seven sealed scroll.

**This we assume but cannot argue with ironclad biblical texts:** There is one event called the Judgment Seat of Christ that will occur after the rapture of the church.

The verse we just read opens the door for me to address the second question:

#### **IV. What Will our Rewards Be Like?**

##### **A. Some of those rewards will likely consist of victor's crowns or wreaths.**

If you have traveled in Christian circles for long you have seen these identified. There is nothing that predicates that there is an exact number of crowns or wreaths. It happens that several are mentioned.

**1. The Unfading Crown of Glory.** This Shepherd's Crown is provided for those who properly feed the flock.

*1Pe 5:1 ¶ The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight [thereof], not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over [God's] heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (AV)*

In Acts 20:28 Paul admonishes the Ephesian elders:

*Ac 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (AV)*

Our Chief Shepherd takes His flock very seriously. He cares for the lambs, the strays, and the injured. Those who would be His under shepherds must remember that this flock has been purchased with His own blood at great price. It is very precious to Him. The Bible says that this oversight is to be done willingly, with an alert and ready mind, and it is to be done with a gentle, humble spirit, by example.



## 2. The Crown Incorruptible.

This crown is given for mastery over the old nature, the flesh. Look at these verses with me.

a.) In verse 24 we see the *contest*:

*1Co 9:24 ¶ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. (AV)*

It is no wonder that the author of Hebrews admonishes us to run with *patience* the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, Who did the same on our behalf.

b.) In verse 25 we see control is the key to winning this crown:

*1Co 9:25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they [do it] to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. (AV)*

It will not just “materialize” on your saintly head.

c.) In verse 26 we see that this should be a matter of great *concern* to us:

*1Co 9:26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air. 27 But I keep under my body, and bring [it] into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (AV)*

Serious Christians will study, or be ambitious, to show themselves approved unto God.

Then, there is the familiar:

## 3. Crown of Rejoicing. This is often called the Soul Winner's Crown.

*1Th 2:19 For what [is] our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? [Are] not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? (AV)*

Regardless of where we place the Bema seat there is going to be a glorious presentation day, a day which seems to be associated with the unveiling of the Lord Jesus Christ as His coming.

I think it is fair to say that more than soul winning is involved. Paul's desire was to present these Thessalonians as mature, disciplined believers. His desire was always to present those to whom he ministered as chaste virgins, espoused to their bridegroom. He told the Colossians who had fallen prey to human wisdom:

*2Co 11:2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ. (AV)*

This whole thought of presentation is marvelous. Will you be presenting anyone to Christ at that great day?

**4. The Crown of Life.** This is apparently given for enduring the trials of faith. The words of James 1:12 come quickly to our minds.

*Jas 1:12 Blessed [is] the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. (AV)*

This trial of our faith is common to all believers; it is to be received with joy as an opportunity to glorify the living Christ.

Finally, we notice:

**5. The Crown of Righteousness.** This is for all those who love His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7.

*2Ti 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished [my] course, I have kept the faith:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (AV)*

We are admonished to fight the good fight of faith in Ephesians 6, finishing, not just beginning the course. This is what God calls for. Paul said in Acts 20:24,

*Ac 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. (AV)*

All of these verses fill us with intensity. They help us focus on the things that are dear to us, the things that are valuable. Fighting the fight of faith and finishing the course, these are the things that matter.

Are these five crowns or wreaths the only ones that will be distributed, or are they only representative of the *kinds* of rewards which will be passed out? *You decide.* Will we wear these crowns or cast them at Jesus feet for His glory? *You decide.* Revelation 4:10, speaking of those elders mentioned earlier, says,

*Re 4:10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (AV)*

Will we only receive crowns, or will we also receive positions of responsibility that will be ours to carry out throughout the millennium? The Apostles had similar questions. They wanted to select their seating positions for the reign of Christ, then and there. The Savior was quick to remind them that those decisions remained with the Father. To what level will we be involved in administering the millennium? *You decide.*

Will we also rule the angels? I have always found 1 Corinthians 6:3 very interesting:

*1Co 6:3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? (AV)*

When will we be judging angels? *You decide.*

But, here is the ultimate question. Is it worth it to give up all we have and are right now in order to enhance this great coming day? *You decide!*

## The Call to Reconciliation

The word *therefore* in verse 11 of 2 Corinthians 5, is very important. In order to gain a proper understanding we need to pause to look at the big picture. Paul has never left off the presentation of his original treatise. In this Corinthian letter Paul has used the issue of defending his own ministry as an occasion to treat the whole subject of the New Covenant ministry and to defend its superiority.

We have no idea had many charges had been made against Paul, or how cruel they became, but we know from our study of both Corinthian books that the charges were numerous in nature. They attacked his intelligence, his appearance, his sanity, his honesty and integrity, and his qualifications. In other words, there was not much about Paul that was not criticized. The problem was this; the criticisms of Paul were effectively criticisms of the gospel. In other words, the goal was to silence Paul in order to silence his message. This is what forced Paul to defend himself on such a grand scale.

Paul has offered a *twofold* response to these attacks. He began with a brief *practical* defense in chapter one, making it absolutely clear that his own personal dealings with the Corinthians were carried out with integrity. He then moved to a *theological* defense of his ministry, again, arguing the *integrity* of the New Covenant ministry. He explained that these Corinthians, themselves, were *his* letter of commendation because the New Covenant had been written in their hearts in contrast to the law that had been engraved in tables of stone. He explained how much greater the glory of the New Covenant was in contrast to the Old.

Based on these arguments, he said in Chapter 4,

*2Co 4:1 ¶ Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; :2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (AV)*

This has been the argument all along, the New Covenant ministry is a ministry of great *glory* and great *integrity*. This is no small matter. We must follow the argument and reasoning of Paul in chapters 1-4 or we will lose our grasp on the big picture. Paul continues to argue that the unsaved Jew and Gentile have had their eyes veiled to the glory of this New Covenant and that you and I have the treasure of this New Covenant in *earthen* vessels. We have a heavenly product in an *earthly* container.

We are an *eternal* people, not simply an earthly people. We who look not on things that are seen, but on the things that are unseen, the things that are eternal. We look forward to our *heavenly* experience, our *heavenly* encounter, our *heavenly* reunion with our *heavenly* Christ, but at the moment we are still in our *earthly* tabernacles.

When we are reunited with Christ at His return, we will be made accountable for how we have administered this New Covenant. That is where we are in our study of Corinthians and it is precisely at this point that we insert verse 11:

2Co 5:11 *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.* 12 ¶ *For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to [answer] them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.* 13 *For whether we be beside ourselves, [it is] to God: or whether we be sober, [it is] for your cause.* 14 *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:* 15 *And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*  
(AV)

Paul is still talking about this ministry of the New Covenant. He has *never* left that theme. He is *still* talking about integrity in ministry. In the course of these next few verses, we are going to see some undeniable absolutes concerning this New Covenant ministry. We will see exactly the kind of ministry that is expected of us. We will see Its Absolute Integrity and Its Absolute Purity. In a later study, we will see Its Absolute Necessity and, Its Absolute Priority.

## I. Its Absolute Integrity

11 *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences*

Properly represented from the Greek, we would want to say “*Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord...*” When we talk about the fear of the Lord, we are talking about the awesome respect associated with His Person. At this point, the question on the floor is “What does the word *therefore* relate to?”

Is Paul saying that *our* fear of the *Lord associated with the judgment seat of Christ* is what motivates us to persuade men? Is he suggesting that, if we are not found *persuading men* down here we will get an extra dose of judgment at the judgment seat of Christ? Is he saying that, out of fear for our own personal judgment we should be persuading others to come to Christ? I do not think that was ever Paul’s intent. I *do* think that Paul wants us to understand two very important things. We as believer priests *will* be accountable for how we administered this New Covenant, and secondly, unbelievers have no idea what lies ahead of them. We who know Christ should be absolutely motivated by our fear for the eternal loss of unbelievers. It is enormously urgent that we *persuade* men. Our knowledge of their future such serve as a powerful motivator.

While both of those things are absolutely true, I do not believe either represents what Paul is getting at in this particular verse. We are talking about the fear of the Lord. The Old Covenant had the *fear* of God, or the terror of the Lord associated with *it* at Mt. Sinai, and it *was* a fearful occasion. It *is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. We must not think that the New Covenant is any less fearful or awesome because its *presentation* is in heaven and not on earth!

In fact, this Covenant is even more awesome! There is even more responsibility attached to the administration of the New Covenant than there was attached to the Old. What Paul is saying is that we must not take this covenant lightly. It is more glorious *and* more awesome than the Old Covenant. It is the only answer.

And so we persuade men. We are committed to the ministry of persuasion. We have seen the *absolute integrity* of the New Covenant because it is associated with the fear of God. We must also see,

## II. Its Absolute Purity

We are not to persuade men *using the world's methods* of imaging. That will serve the world no good and it will do us no service. Look at the very next phrase.

*...but we are made manifest unto God;*

### A. We minister *first* toward God.

In the final analysis it is not what men may think of us, it is what God thinks of us. It is not what men see, it is what God sees. It is not whether men think we are right, it is whether God thinks we are right. We do not serve to be seen of men, we serve to be seen of God.

We have never lived in a time when Christians have worked harder to have their ministry accepted by others than now. We must be careful because there has never been a generation of young people who are more the victims of peer pressure than our present generation. We please God not men. Men are fickle. Men change. There are no eternal rewards for pleasing men:

A fable that has been passed down for generations tells about an elderly man who was traveling with a boy and a donkey. As they walked through a village, the man was leading the donkey and the boy was walking behind. The townspeople said the old man was a fool for not riding, so to please them he climbed up on the animal's back. When they came to the next village, the people said the old man was cruel to let the child walk while he enjoyed the ride. So, to please them, he got off and set the boy on the animal's back and continued on his way. In the third village, people accused the child of being lazy for making the old man walk, and the suggestion was made that they both ride. So the man climbed on and they set off again. In the fourth village, the townspeople were indignant at the cruelty to the donkey because he was made to carry two people. The frustrated man was last seen carrying the donkey down the road.

It is better to please God *first* because God does not change His demands and His rewards are eternal! And this applies to every area of our lives, not just to our preaching and teaching. Paul said in Ephesians:

*Eph 6:5 Servants, be obedient to them that are [your] masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; :6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; (AV)*

But please notice, while we minister *first* toward God, we still make ourselves responsible for the impressions we give to believers.

### B. We minister *secondly*, with our brethren in mind.

*...and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.*

If we see a contradiction in these statements, it is because they do not read them carefully. It is true that we are accountable first to God, and when it comes to being obedient to God, the opinions of others matter nothing. We obey God first, before any man. However, while we do not particularly care about the *opinions* of fellow Christians, we do care about their *consciences*. We do want to minister God's Word in such a way that we do not offend the consciences of other

believers. Your conscience is not your taste. Your conscience is not your opinion. Your conscience is what sits in judgment over you concerning issues of real right and wrong.

So, we minister toward God, we minister toward the consciences of our brethren. Thirdly,

### **C. We minister with the enemies of the gospel in mind.**

*For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to [answer] them which glory in appearance, and not in heart*

One of the beauties of Christianity is that it frees us from peer pressure. We live and breathe to please God and that is all that matters. Nothing else matters. However, every now and then, irresponsible Christians come along behaving as they please while arguing that they are accountable only to God. These charlatans with their dog and pony shows, these deceitful workers who drag the name of Christ down into show business, fraud, and disobedience give the world great occasion to scoff and mock. The world sees, and takes note and returns to us with just the right snide remark at the right time.

Later in Corinthians Paul will actually be forced to “brag” concerning his ministry, not to produce a better resume, not to gain the praise of men, but to take away the *occasion* the false accusers are using in order to reduce Paul to their level. The world wants to reduce believers to its level, and we must not give the world occasion to do so. Paul told Timothy:

*1Ti 5:14 I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. (AV)*

Let me ask, have you given occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully, this week?

Have you ever wondered why the unbelievers glory so much in appearance? Have you ever wondered why their celebrities and stars are so important to them? That is all they have to compare themselves by. There is nothing on the inside. They are looking for worth and affirmation.

A commercial for the Buick Riviera argued this point. The man bragging because he just came back from his class reunion where he was able to make a snide remark to his former schoolmate, once voted most likely to succeed. The poor fool was driving a Ford Taurus. This is how the world thinks! This is how the world judges! It judges by *appearance* or by any other available form of snobbery.

But there is an important distinction when we talk about the matter of *appearances*. The Christian is only concerned about appearances for *one reason*. He does not use appearances and images in order to attract men to Christ. He needs no gimmicks, and he robs the gospel of its glory when he plays those games. The Christian is concerned about appearance, *only* for the purpose of *avoiding reproach*.

I talked to a young lady whose behavior was so worldly that there was no way she could be distinguished from the unsaved. Her response to me was, “*It’s my body, it’s my right, it’s my decision. It does not matter to me what others think about me.*” She was wrong on all counts.

What this girl was saying was that she was the most important person in the world and that the souls and consciences of others do not matter to her as much as her own freedom does.

If you know Christ it is not your right, it is not your body, it is not your decision, and it does matter what others think about you. It is an eternal issue. The souls of others and the eternal destiny of others are at stake. This is what verse 13 is about. We minister with God and others in mind!

*13 For whether we be beside ourselves, [it is] to God: or whether we be sober, [it is] for your cause*

On the one hand, our ministry toward God makes it a glorious ministry, a ministry of ecstasy. On the other hand, our ministry toward man makes it a ministry of sobriety because the stakes are so high.

The traditional way of looking at this verse make very little sense to me because it views the term *beside ourselves* as meaning to be *insane*. In most cases, the scriptural use of this term does *not* imply insanity. It implies *ecstasy*, wonder, and marveling. When Paul is accused of being mad in Acts 26:24 a different word is used which definitely refers to insanity.

What might Paul be saying? When we are in ecstasy it is from God and to the glory of God. When we are sober, it is for the cause of ministry. I believe the only answer is to treat the thought as a continuation from the previous verse. In a word, Paul is saying that in a sense, we do boast and we do commend ourselves. We commend and defend ourselves only to avoid reproach. We do not glory in it. Rather, the joy, and the blessing, and the ecstasy that comes into our lives is the result of our position in Christ. The seriousness, on the other hand, with which we approach these issues is for the benefit of *men*. We live unto God first, we live unto others secondly, and we do not focus, in particular, on living for our personal benefit. That day will come later.

How do we tie these thoughts together? We conclude by reminding ourselves that life is no table game. The stakes are high. We are in a battle, a struggle for the souls of men. We are here to rescue our young people from the lures of the wicked one. We are here to protect our new converts from the onslaughts of false teaching and the consequences of compromise. We are here to contradict those who would demean our testimony and our Christ. We are here to win the lost. We are not here to buy homes and build for retirement. We are not here to drive fancy cars. We are not here to build great careers in business and industry. We are aliens, administering a New Covenant. All other objectives are secondary.

## This Constraining Love (Reconciliation - II)

*Intro:* We are looking at seven of the most compelling words in scripture. They are the first words of 2 Corinthians 5:14:

*For the love of Christ constraineth us;*

It is the love of Christ which woos us. It is the love of Christ which satisfies, nurtures, and restores us.

According to an old legend, a man became lost in his travels and wandered into a bed of quicksand. Confucius saw the man's predicament and said, "It is evident that men should stay out of places such as this." Next, Buddha observed the situation and said, "Let that man's plight be a lesson to the rest of the world." Then Muhammad came by and said to the sinking man, "Alas, it is the will of God." Finally, Jesus appeared. "Take my hand, brother," He said, "and I will save you."

That really says it all. It is the love of Christ that did not allow *Him* to close his eyes to the world, and it is the love of Christ which keeps *us* from closing our eyes to the needs of the lost around us. It is the love of Christ that is really at the *base* of the New Covenant. It is the stuff of its very foundation. As we look more closely at this text, however, we discover that the emphasis is not just on Christ and His love, the emphasis is clearly on our *response* to that love.

*2Co 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: (AV)*

We are about to see some important contrasts, contrasts between modern concepts of love and the Biblical concept of love. We shall call this first point:

### I. Love Demanded

#### A. It is an aggressive love.

This love of Christ which *constrains* us presses on us like the two sides of an Oreo cookie press on the cream. It puts the *squeeze* on us.

Do not confuse this, for even a minute with the world's brand of love. The world's brand of love is *tolerant* and passive. It is not generally assertive. Notice Philippians 1:23 with me:

*Php 1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: (AV)*

When Paul said he was in a *strait betwixt two* he was using the same Greek word represented by constraint in this verse. He was expressing *tension*, and this truly is the irony of true love. It always produces *tension*.



Again, someone has noted:

Buddha sits enthroned beneath the Bo tree in the lotus position. His lips are faintly parted in the smile of one who has passed beyond every power in earth or heaven to touch him. "He who loves fifty has fifty woes, he who loves ten has ten woes, he who loves none has no woes," he has said. His eyes are closed.

Christ, on the other hand, stands in the garden of Gethsemane, angular, beleaguered. His face is lost in shadows so that you can't even see his lips, and before all the powers in earth or heaven he is powerless. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you," he has said. His eyes are also closed.

The difference seems to me this. The suffering that Buddha's eyes close out is the suffering of the world that Christ's eyes close in and hallow.

This is all the difference in the world. That is the kind of love we embrace. The second thing we know about Christ's love which sets it off from the world's love is:

## **B. It is an intelligent love.**

Paul begins with his reasoning:

2Co 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: (AV)

Paul says, *we thus judge*, we reason, we argue and we discern. Paul says that it is *logical* that we should opt for this kind of love. If *one* died for all, then were *all* dead. It is a decision. Love starts with the head and ends with the heart. Love is always a decision. It is an obligation to which we commit ourselves.

**1.) This love *can* be imitated but it cannot be duplicated.** Now and then the world gets glimpses of divine love - Christ's love - and it even feigns or attempts vain imitations of it.. But it is never truly successful - at least for very long - because unbelievers are usually filled with notions and misconceptions about love.

For example, a young couple comes into the pastor's office deciding that it is time to end their marriage. They no longer have the feelings; they no longer have the romance, the passion, or the zest. They have become confused. They have associated their love with feelings first. They have things reversed. Love *starts* with the head (it is a decision); it *continues* with the will, and finally *rests* in the heart. Reverse this order and your marriage may crumble.

Others confuse Agape love with the love that *dogs* have. They think that agape love is simply *unconditional acceptance*. But the love of a dog and the love of God are two completely different kinds of love. A dog does not see the faults of his master. He loves criminal and child alike. God *sees* the faults of those whom He loves and *decides* to love them still. A dog is loyal because he is a pack animal and loyalty is a survival instinct which God has placed in him. And there is a limit to the affections of a dog, its affections and loyalty *can* be purchased.

**2.) This love must always be *initiated* by our understanding, first, and then by our feelings.**

I am glad when a student comes to me and you says, "I have a deep burden for the Bongo Bongo," I want to go there to be a missionary. However, that burden will not be enough to carry that student through the approaching years of struggle. Burdens are like romances, they serve the purpose of getting our attention, of attracting us. One's burden may get one all the way to the Bongo Bongo, but his burden will not keep him there. Subtle changes will begin to take place in his thinking about those souls to whom he has gone. Their culture, which he could initially tolerate will loom up in front of him as a great obstacle, and small irritations will later feed great consternation. Their ways will begin to irritate him. The romance and the joy of being on God's front lines fades away when we finally get in the foxholes and trenches and reality of daily living. One's commitment will keep him there a while longer and his fear of being seen as a failure may keep him there for a time after that, but it is likely he will ultimately fail. Burden is not enough. What is required? There must be a daily decision to love and serve those to whom we are called. Implicit in servanthood is the idea of making our master's will our will. This decision will filter down from the will to the heart, and the love of Christ will fill us with the kind of constraint which will produce real fruit in the lives of those to whom we are called. The day then comes when we actually wish we could stay in Bongo Bongo rather than taking our forced furloughs!

### **C. It is a reasonable Love.**

What is the reason? What reason can carry me past my emotions and willpower and volition? What reason could possibly be strong enough to do this? Here is the reason:

*2Co 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (AV)*

If one died for all then were all dead; that is the *reason*. And if all are dead, all need to hear. All need the ministry of reconciliation. Those who live must no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. We see three simple steps in this reasoning process. First, *one* died for all. Secondly, this assumes *all were dead*, or one would not have needed to die for all. Finally, those who now *live*, live unto Christ.

In the first point we put to rest the arguments of the extreme Calvinist. Paul states clearly that One died for *all*. Christ died for all men, not simply the elect. The argument centers on the word *for*, (*huper* in the Greek). Five point Calvinists point out the fact that this word can have two meanings. Paul could have been saying: Christ died *in place of*, or *instead of*. Alternately, Paul could have been saying Christ died *for the benefit of*, for the *sake of*. They, obviously choose the second definition because it is unthinkable for a Hyper Calvinist to believe that Christ's atonement was *wasted* in any way on the objects of God's wrath.

I will not engage in all the details of the longer argument. I will only announce the winner. The extreme Calvinist is wrong. Christ died *in place of* lost sinners. He died on behalf of all men everywhere. Christ died for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. He did not *impute* their sins unto them. We read in Galatians 3:13:

*Ga 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that hangeth on a tree: (AV)*

When we read that Christ was made a curse *for* us it is the same Greek word, (*huper*) and it can only imply substitution. The distinction is crystal clear in the verses which are right in front of us.

On the one hand Paul says that Christ died for *all*, but notice what He does not say. He does not say that He died for *all* so that *all* would live. He says,

*And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves*

Not *all* live. Not all are saved just because Christ died for all. But those who *do* live should no longer live unto themselves. While Christ died on behalf of all men, His blood was not applied on behalf of all men. His blood was applied in the heavens on behalf of those who have come to Christ by faith. It was applied for those who have ceased from their labors and have entered into that rest which comes from trusting in Christ's finished work, alone.

How many drops of blood does it take to save a soul? And how large must the drops be? You say *how foolish!* Of course it is a foolish. It is foolish because it asks a quantitative question about a qualitative fact. It is a question of *quality*, not *quantity*. One drop of Christ's blood is sufficient to atone for all the sins of all men, but not all men will understand this. Not all men will *live*. Will you live or will you remain in spiritual death? Where do you stand with Christ?

Remember Paul's reasoning: Firstly, *one* died for all. Secondly, this assumes *all* were *dead*, (or one would not have needed to die for all.) This assumes *you* are dead. *You* were born dead. *You* need Christ's life. You may have it now. Finally, those who now *live* live unto Christ.

This last statement which requires us to move directly to the second point of the study. First, we saw love demanded. Now, we see:

## II. The Love Demonstrated

As this *love of Christ* begins to constrain us, it will begin making some changes in us:

*2Co 5:15 And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (AV)*

### A. This constraining love changes our *direction*.

We were not simply saved *from* sin. We were not simply saved *from* death. We were saved *unto* something. We were saved *unto life*. More than that, we were saved *unto Christ*. Our new life presumes a new focus.

For a point of argument, assume reincarnation exists, (foolish thought!) In your last life, you would like to think you conducted a symphony. In truth, you were a lowly earthworm that never saw the light of day. Clearly, your passions, motives, appetites interests, hopes, and aspirations were of a different order. Now, the difference between your old walk in the flesh and your new walk in Christ is far more dramatic than the difference between the life of an earthworm and the life of a man. New life in Christ is so dramatic and so revolutionary, that no book has ever been written which has fully revealed the contrasts, or has fully explored the idea of what it means to truly live *unto Him who died for us and rose again*. This new life *is resurrection* life. It is far more than returning in another life form. It is Christ centered. It is Christ oriented. Because we have been placed in Christ, we become a part *collectively* of Christ, and we are a part of a completely new organism and a completely new genre. Christ was made, for a little while, lower than the angels, so that we could be elevated to this new, high position. We now live *unto* Him.

## B. This constraining love changes our *perception*.

2Co 5:16 ¶ Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we [him] no more. (AV)

Please do not make an error when you read this. Paul is simply reminding us *when Christ came in the flesh*; He was seen *first* as simply being *another man*. Perhaps He was seen an exceptional man, perhaps a prophet (as the cultists see him today.) Perhaps He was even seen an *exalted man*, as the Mormons see Him today. But they did not truly see Him as God. You and I who know Christ know better. We no longer regard Christ from the human point of view. He is now the center of our universe, the source of our very life and breath, the icon of our hope, the object of our longings, the master of our daily routines, and a hundred things more.

This, in turn changes our attitude toward men. We have a new way of viewing men, of grouping them. We are no longer satisfied with the doctrine of pluralism. We no longer group men by race or culture, gender, or political affinities. We group men in two classes only, those who are *in Christ* and those who are not *in Christ*. Because our perception of Christ has changed our perception of men has changed.

## C. This constraining love changes our *affections*.

2Co 5:17 Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. {he is: or, let him be} (AV)

From the perspective of the original language, it would be good if we just transliterated this into English. By so reading it, we would say: *So that, if anyone in Christ, a new creation*. We often take such a self-centered view of this verse. We look at it and we say, *isn't it wonderful, I am a new creature in Christ! I am a new person!* That is OK. I do not have any argument with that. But, you must not stop there; you must not miss what Paul is truly intending here. Paul is arguing something far more profound. You are now collectively a part of *the new creation!* You are in *the body*. We have been absorbed *into Christ*. We are now *in Him* and He is *in us*. You, being in Christ are *seated with Him* in the heavenlies at this very moment. You no longer look from earth toward heaven; you look from heaven toward earth!

Nothing in your life will go unchanged once the dynamics of the new creation begin to take effect in your walk. Once you have absorbed yourself in who you are in Christ, *everything* changes. Has your new creation life changed you, or, are you still dominated by your old earthworm ways? Are you still titillated and tantalized by feeding on biological decay, or, are you feeding your new appetites? Does the love of Christ constrain you, or does the love of self contain you?

You say, *I do not feel any different* now that I am a Christian. It is simply a matter of the food you eat and the neighborhood in which you live. Feed on heavenly things; feed on the Word of God and feed on fellowship with Christ, and your appetites for new creation things will grow. And then, remember your address. You are in Christ, in heaven, seated with Him at this very moment. When these two thoughts are kept in mind the love of Christ *will* constrain you and your position *in Christ* will direct you as you become absorbed in His Person and Plan.

## This New Ministry (Reconciliation - III)

*Intro:* I saw two women in the coffee shop working intently on their Sierra Club business. I thought quietly, why do you bother? First, you are hypocrites. You drive fossil burning vehicles to the coffee shop where you drink beverages from beans shipped in from South America or Africa out of paper cups made from harvested trees, wiping your faces with disposable paper napkins not even made from recycled paper, while wearing partially synthetic fabrics and ornaments. Both were clearly wealthy, but we will not speculate on the possible earth destroying industrial contamination that contributed to their affluence. But, secondly, I thought, “you are naive. Why do you bother trying to save the animals and their habitats when you know full well that the mathematical odds all argue strongly in favor of the fact that this planet will be destroyed by asteroids hurling through space? Every law of math, every law of probability, argues that it is only a matter of time before life on earth will be snuffed out from the sky, long before it will have occasion to be sucked into the hellish abyss of the sun. It’s *all* going to end.

Am I opposed to stewardship of the earth’s resources? Of course not. That is not my point. My point rests in the words *hypocrisy* and *naiveté*, the two base ingredients that are found in the answers which men offer to life’s questions any time they leave God out of the equation.

If you were to ask, in a word, what is the power of Christianity? I would answer you in a word; it is because it is so *satisfying*. It satisfies every need, every emotional need, every personal need, and every intellectual and philosophical need of man. And it does so with simple profundity. There is not a philosophical or religious or social question which man can ask that is not answered in either the incarnation, the sacrifice, or the resurrection of Christ. These truths are so simple that the youngest child can understand them. They are so profound that they answer the hardest questions. I am stunned by those answers every time I re-examine them. The answer to every single question of life is ultimately found in these three truths. Recently, I challenged two friends to suggest to me a doctrinal error of any sort which does not ultimately lead to wrong thinking about Jesus Christ. They could not do it. Unlike the philosophies of the world, we have a universally cohesive system which is not hypocritical or naive.

That is what Paul is arguing in the very passage which is before us. He is arguing that we must not leave the incarnation of Christ at the manger. He is arguing that we must not leave the sacrifice of Christ at the cross. He is arguing that we must not leave the resurrection of Christ at the garden tomb. He is arguing that these three events are more than just historical incidents; they are the dynamics which apply on this very day at this very moment to all of life’s questions and struggles. They are so simple a young child can grasp them and so profound that we never exhaust them.

Take our text, for example. In verses 15-17 Paul has been arguing the death and *resurrection* of Christ. It is not just the fact that these events occurred, but the fact that these events impact every aspect of our lives. The resurrection forever changes our life dynamics. You do not need to worry about Hubbard’s absurd *Dianetics*, you are engaged in resurrection *dynamics*.

*2Co 5:15 And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. 16 ¶ Wherefore henceforth know we no man after*

*the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we [him] no more. 17 Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (AV)*

Paul is arguing that it is the death and resurrection of Christ which has given us, first:

## I. A New Life

Paul is telling us that it is not simply the *incarnated* Christ with whom we are engaged, it is the *resurrected* Christ. It is not Christmas which actually changes us, it is Resurrection Day. It is the resurrection which changes our relationship to God and our relationship to men. It is the resurrection life of Christ which makes *all things* new.

We reaffirm what was stated earlier, we are too glib with verse 17. We are too quick to simply argue for the personal *advantages* of being in Christ; too hesitant to ask ourselves the question, what does it *really mean* when Paul says *all things are become new*? That term, *all things* is galactic in scope, and no humble preacher can presume to touch upon it, much less exhaust its depth! G. Campbell Morgan has a wonderful message on this theme. He talks about some of the fundamental driving forces in all men, love of self, passion for ownership of goods, love of kindred and friends, and love of country. He then goes on to explain how each of these areas in our lives is changed forever when we are placed in Christ. The point is we now see all of life and the entire world through the lens of the cross of Christ. Every thing, great and small, changes.

Perhaps it would be helpful for us to state things another way. If *all things* have become new then *no things* remain unchanged. We do not view *even one single thing* the same way after we come to know Christ. There is nothing which is not ultimately changed because of being in Christ. We also have,

## II. A New Ministry

This ministry is identified in verse 18, its message is clarified in verses 19, and 20 and its authority is certified in verse 21.

### A. This Ministry Identified

*2Co 5:18 And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (AV)*

By name, this new covenant ministry is called *the ministry of reconciliation*. Reconciliation should not be confused with salvation. The two terms are not interchangeable though, hopefully reconciliation results in salvation.

While the word occurs in the Old Testament in English, it really does not occur as such in Hebrew. The New Testament word *reconciliation* simply means *to change thoroughly* or *to change completely*. It is closely associated with the picture of money changing hands as men make change with their money. It is better, however, simply to understand reconciliation to mean *to*

*change completely.* Remember this, and, when you can, simply substitute the words *change completely* every time you encounter the word *reconcile* in your Bible. It will help.

Another thing you may want to remember is that, technically, God never reconciles Himself to us. God does not reconcile Himself *to us*. He reconciles us *to Himself*. God does not change in this salvation process, He provides the avenue for *our* change. So far, then, we have said that reconciliation is a process of complete change. It is God providing the avenue for a complete change for man by providing for our placement in Christ. And that is exactly why Paul mentions reconciliation at this very point in our text, because Paul is talking about *change*. He is talking about the universal or complete change that occurs in the man who is placed into Christ, the change which comes into the man who becomes a part of the new creation.

During a presidential campaign in the 1990's a unique emphasis was placed on bridges. President Clinton campaigned on the theme that he was a bridge to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He saw his opponent as a bridge to the past. The Republicans said that Mr. Clinton's bridge to the future was a toll bridge. I see the idea of reconciliation very much the way I see a bridge, a toll bridge, a bridge from death unto life. No man was ever able to pay that toll, for the penalty of sin was too great. It was death. Jesus Christ paid that toll. It was not, however, some random act of kindness on His part. This whole plan was implemented in eternity past. In fact, if you will look at this verse, three things become immediately obvious concerning this ministry of reconciliation.

**1.) God *initiated it*.** That's the first thing you see. Sometimes, we cast God in a very dark light, so pay attention to those words before your eyes:

"...and all things are of God." Remember, we are talking about *all things* being made new. All things are *of God*. He is the initiator. He is the source. As stated, we paint some strange pictures of our Great God. Because we see Christ *interceding* for us at the right hand of God we are tempted to think that God is sort of the ill-tempered angry one, and Christ is the good guy who makes everything right for us. If we are Catholics, we push God even further back in the process. We pray to Mary that she will pray to Christ who will pray to the Father. And, if we really, really need help, we pray to the saints who, hopefully, will speak to Mary who, hopefully will speak to Christ who, hopefully, will speak to this distant God who hovers in the background - as though he is too Holy to be approached by such earthly slime balls as us.

Christ is not interceding for us because God will not respond to us. Christ is not the good guy and the Father is not the bad guy. It was this God, God the Father, who so loved the world that He gave us His *only begotten, dearly loved, precious darling* Son. It was this Father who *initiated* the whole process of *reconciliation*. Jesus Christ did not initiate this process. God the Father initiated this process of reconciliation. And, please, taste the rest of the sweetness in that phrase: And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself. The word himself refers back to God the Father, Himself.

A few years ago I reviewed a Disney movie for children on television called Beethoven - II. You need to understand that Disney has fast fallen out of the graces of Christ loving believers everywhere because evidence of their anti biblical agenda is popping up in all their entertainment activities. So, I am quick to say that I was watching with a critical eye, and, maybe I was too critical. But I have learned that Hollywood will always cast three people in a bad light. First, they always cast pastors as self-serving imbeciles, secondly, they always cast Christians as nincompoops, and finally, they prefer to cast dads as *duffos* at best, and unapproachable at the least, and always not quite in touch. In Toy Story, for instance, they don't even bother giving the children a Dad. The mother, on the other hand, was the gentle intercessor who, in Beethoven, stands between the children and their father's wrath.

We need to be careful about how we cast earthly fathers and we need to be careful about how we cast our heavenly father. He initiated salvation's plan. It was His love that found the way. Secondly,

**2.) Christ *implemented* the plan.** The next phrase in the verse tells us this:

*And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ*

The reconciliation process was initiated by Jesus Christ. He paid the price. He paid the toll. He became the willing *servant* carrying out the Father's *will*. This was done through the blood of His cross.

This reveals a volume of truth. First, it indicates that if Christ provided our reconciliation, then we must have been in a state of *alienation*. We are sinners, separated from God. Secondly, it tells us how *far* God was willing to go. We were His enemies, not his friends. Paul says in Romans:

*Ro 5:10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (AV)*

God gave His Son for His enemies. Only tremendous love could pay such a tremendous cost, to save such tremendous filthy, vile, sinners such as comprise this human race. Do not humanize God. Do not throw this back into His face with some pious, self-centered remark like, "*God could never love someone as evil as I am.*" He *already* has answered that nonsense. He has paid a great price for your salvation.

Then, we come to the *third* amazing fact about this subject of reconciliation. The Father initiated it, the Son implemented it through His death. Now,

**3.) We are commissioned to *administrate* it the plan.** This is a heavy task. Look again at the last words in that verse:

*2Co 5:18 And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (AV)*

Don't lose the thrust of the argument. All things become new for the man who is in Christ. When we appropriate the *reconciliation* which is ours in Christ, it *changes us*, and in turn, makes *us* the *ministers* or (diakonia) of this New Covenant truth.

There are a few folks who take a strange view of this verse. They say that the average Christian does not have the ministry of reconciliation committed unto Him and that only Paul and the apostles had that ministry. Remember, Paul *does* seem to address these Corinthians in the next verses as though he is asking *them* to be reconciled to God. But the truth of the matter is that the folks who hold this view miss the whole point of the passage. Being *in Christ* makes us *part and parcel* with the *ministry* of Christ. Because His *is* the ministry of reconciliation it is now *our* ministry because we are part of the new creation.



*You* are charged with this ministry just as surely as I am. And, I am charged with it just as surely as these Corinthians were. They were charged with it just as surely as Paul was. And, Paul was charged with it just as surely as Christ was, because we are all *in Christ*.

We have seen this ministry is identified in verse 18. We have seen that God initiated it, Christ implemented it (at the cross), and we are called to administer it. In verses 19 and 20 we will see its Message is Clarified.

This study is not going to provide a full treatment of verse 19 at this time. As we look at these verses, however, we will see how the ministry of reconciliation relates to the *world* and how it relates to the *elect*.

I end this study asking you to meditate on the theme of reconciliation. I leave you with these three questions. To begin, have you been reconciled with God? Have you appreciated how far He has gone to provide you with this great salvation?

And then, if you are a new person in Christ and you have accepted this wonderful reconciliation on your behalf, are you still holding out? Are you still withholding the reconciliation that someone else needs, a parent, a former employer, a fellow church member or a neighbor?

Listen to Corrie Ten Boom's story:

Years after her concentration camp experiences in Nazi Germany, Corrie ten Boom met face to face one of the most cruel and heartless German guards that she had ever contacted. He had humiliated and degraded her and her sister. He had jeered and visually raped them as they stood in the delousing shower. Now he stood before her with hand outstretched and said, "Will you forgive me?" She writes: "I stood there with coldness clutching at my heart, but I know that the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. I prayed, Jesus, help me! Woodenly, mechanically I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me and I experienced an incredible thing. The current started in my shoulder, raced down into my arms and sprang into our clutched hands. Then this warm reconciliation seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. 'I forgive you, brother,' I cried with my whole heart. For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard, the former prisoner. I have never known the love of God so intensely as I did in that moment!" To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you.

And what would be the point? The ministry of reconciliation is only a hypocritical facade if you have not applied it to your own life. One cannot urge others to be reconciled to God who will not reconcile himself to others, can he? Being a new creation in Christ calls for a new behavior.

## When Christ Became Sin for Us

Intro: A while back, we decided to retire our old clunker and purchase a new car. After doing a great deal of research regarding what was available to us we narrowed our choices down to two cars. Both cars were the same age and size. Both had four cylinders and four doors and both carried the same warranty from the same dealer. One car, however, was about a thousand dollars cheaper than the other, the interior was much nicer, it had anti-lock brakes and other features which the second car did not have, and it was a little more stylish. We did not buy that car. Instead, we took the car that cost \$1,000 more with fewer features.

There was good reason for this choice, though it was not apparent *on the surface*. We chose the second car because it had a superior engine. You see, when we went car shopping, we shopped for engines first, and body style second. The nicer looking car had a 1980's vintage engine that had been retrofitted with some improvements. The car we purchased had new technology with a dual overhead cam, 16-valve engine with sequential multi-port fuel injection. This smaller engine delivered more horsepower and actually afforded us much higher mileage, longer projected vehicle life, and higher trade in value.

What makes the gospel of Jesus Christ so unique among all the false gospels of the world is its *engine*. That is what makes the difference. That is what we are looking at. We are looking "under the hood" of the gospel, so to speak, to understand why it is such a high powered engine. We find it in 2 Corinthians 5:21.

*21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

This is the heart of the gospel. This, in a nutshell, is *why* the gospel works. The *chronological* details of the gospel are found in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul tells us what he delivered to us when he gave us the gospel. He says:

*3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;*

*4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

*5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:*

In these verses we have the facts of the gospel explained. In these verses we find all one needs to know in order to be saved. But, the *dynamics* of the gospel are not explained in these verses. The power of the gospel is locked up in the simple statement which we have in front of us.

*21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

I repeat, that is *why* the gospel works. We are looking under the hood, at the very engine of the gospel. And when we look at this verse, first thing we must do is confess our childish stupidity. No great pastor, no venerable scholar of the church and no great figure of history has ever been

able to plumb the depths of this statement. We can only scratch at the crust, not even touching the mantle, much less the core of this planetary truth.

*21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

Keeping in mind that we are mere children, toying with trifles, we will nevertheless, engage ourselves in this intriguing verse for our own benefit and edification. First, let us ask, what does it say, and then, what is its significance? We will ask these questions, knowing that they have never been fully answered by anyone.

## **I. What Does the Verse Say?**

### **A. First, remember the *problem* with which we are grappling.**

We are talking about the matter of reconciliation between man and God. Paul is approaching us as an ambassador of Jesus Christ *with the terms of our surrender to God*. Paul is offering an end of the long war against God. He is offering more than just peace, He is offering us membership in God's family.

And this is not just *any* god, such as those conjured up in the minds of men. This God with whom we have to do is Jehovah God, the Holy God who can abide no sin in His presence. This huge chasm which separates God and man is incomprehensible. Spurgeon once wrote in this respect:

“Ah man! Thou hast bid defiance to the King of heaven, whose power is irresistible; by whom rocks are thrown down; whose voice breaketh the cedars of Lebanon; whose hand controlleth the great deep sea. He it is who bindeth the clouds with a cord, and girdleth the earth with a belt! Angels that excel in strength cannot stand against Him. From the lofty battlements of heaven He hurled down Satan, the great archangel, and the mighty host of rebellious morning stars! How canst thou stand against him; shall the stubble contend with the fire? Shall the potter's vessel resist the rod of iron? What are they but a moth easily crushed beneath his finger! Breath is in thy nostrils and that is not thine own; how then canst thou, poor mortal, contend with him who only hath immortality. With a puff of his mouth he can drive thee away like chaff. Thou art broken more rapidly than a sear leaf in the wind! How canst thou venture to be at war with One who has heaven and earth at his command, who holds the keys of hell and death, and who has Tophet as his source of ammunition against thee? Listen to his thunders, and let thy blood curdle...”

There is a great chasm between God and man! Some have tried to span it with their artificial bridges, but they all wash away in the flood of His holy wrath *which flows as freely from His throne as does the flood of His love*. This can be no ordinary bridge conjured up by religious engineers in the minds of men. The only bridge between God and man takes the shape of person, Jesus Christ, who Himself, is that bridge. He *is* the peace treaty.

### **B. Secondly, look at the *participants* in this plan.**

He, that is God, the Father, He hath made Him, that is Jesus Christ, to be sin for us.

Recently I had a problem with the phone company. When I spoke to a supervisor about it I was treated with a surprising amount of discourtesy. What the supervisor did not know was that I knew someone in the phone company who knew others in much higher positions than hers. When my advocate stepped in my problem was solved within hours. Consider this: God Himself stepped in on your behalf, and through His only son, provided the terms for *your redemption*. This is not the head of the phone company. This is not the head of AT&T. This is not the President. This is God Himself. Turn your back on this peace offer and there is no other place to go. This is why the author of Hebrews says..”*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation!*”

### C. Thirdly, notice the *process*, and look at the parallelism in this plan.

This is what we call *antithetic parallelism*. Don't let the term distract you. Its meaning is so obvious we can all see it in a glance.

- ⇒ First, Christ was made sin for us, so that
- ⇒ Secondly, we might be made the *righteousness* of God in Him.

These two thoughts are linked. They are parallel. Christ (who knew no sin) is made sin so that we might be made the righteousness of God. We cannot understand either statement, outside of the context of the other statement. The problem is, we just can't understand the statements anyway! All we know is that we are on the edge of something very big! What does it really mean for Christ to be made sin? What does it really mean for us to be made the righteousness of God? These are deep deep pools, indeed, into which we have just been baptized. We will peer down into the pools, but first, just grasp the elementary facts.

The *problem* is we need to be reconciled to God. The *participants* in the plan are God the Father and His Son. The *process* of reconciliation: God made His Son, who knew no sin, to be sin for us so that we might be made the *righteousness of God* in Him. We are ready to advance to the second question.

## II. What Is The Significance of This Verse?

What does it mean for the sinless Christ to be made sin?

### A. We must reject what is *not* said.

We must pay strict attention to the words. We must not *add* any words or meaning to the text, and we must not take any away.

1. We must not say, as one author does, that God sees Christ as *if* He is sin. That statement may be true but that is not what this passage says. This passage says Christ was *made* sin, not *declared* to be sin. “Declared” would have been the appropriate word if that was all that God meant.

2. This verse does not emphasize the fact that Christ *did* no sin. Of course, Christ was sinless. Of course, He did no sin. But that is not the argument of this verse. The argument of this verse is

that Christ *knew*, (gnosko) no sin. Sin was not a part of his experience. He had not been contaminated by it.

3. This verse does not say that Christ was made *sinful*, or that He was made *a sinner*. In other words, this verse does not suggest that Christ needed to *sin in any way* in order to bring about our redemption. We are not like some Mormons who praise Adam for sinning in order to provide our redemption from it! Christ did not become *sinful* or become a *sinner*.

4. This verse does not even say that Christ *became sin* for us. Rather, the Father *made* Christ sin. This is the Greek word poieo, (poy-eh-o) and it means to make or author something. In fact, even the words “*to be*” are not in the Greek, they are supplied for readability. If we would be accurate we must simply read: “*For he hath made him sin for us*”

5. Notice that the word sin is *singular*. It does not say *sins*, as though He became the composite of all the individual acts of sin that had ever been or will ever be committed by mankind. We are talking about sin in its qualitative aspect, not sins. While Christ died *for* our sins, He did not become our *sins*. He became sin.

So much for technicalities.

## **B. We must accept the things we *know* to be true.**

Let's get our teeth into the issue at hand. What is the significance of this statement that God made Christ sin. What can we assume to be true about this statement?

1. We know this verse is teaching us the doctrine of *identification*. We discover this fact by looking backward toward the Old Testament. The key to understanding this is locked up in that word *sin*. Christ was *made sin* or *hamartia*. We read concerning the sin offering in Leviticus 4:24:

*24 And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD: it is a sin offering.*

Do you see the words *it is a sin offering*? Bible students will be quick to tell you that that is a single word in the Hebrew, and the word means sin. It is translated 182 times simply as sin. It is translated 116 times as sin offering. Clearly, in God's eyes, God *identifies* the sin offering with sin. We may say that the offering becomes sin in God's eyes. See also Leviticus 5:12:

*12 Then shall he bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it, even a memorial thereof, and burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: it is a sin offering.*

In keeping with the Old Testament sacrifices, God identifies His Son as the sin offering, the One who is made *sin* for us. So, we see identification. But is that all there is to this truth?

**2. We know this verse is also teaching us the doctrine of *substitution*.** We discover this by looking forward to the book of Galatians. We can make this point by looking at a similar passage in Galatians 3:13. Here we read:

*13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:*

Christ was made a curse for us. He was cursed in our place. He redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse. That is substitution. That is one reason why it is such a terrible thing to reject salvation. Christ died in your place.

3. We know this verse is also teaching us the doctrine of imputation. We discover this by looking at the very context of these verses. For instance, this whole discussion started off a few verses ago when we read in verse 19:

*19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

“Imputing” is a vital New Testament accounting term. God is changing the balances. He is not just paying the debt, He is crediting righteousness to our account.

These are amazing facts concerning what it means for Christ to be made sin for us, but is that all there is to this truth? This is where the issue gets touchy. When we talk about identification, or substitution, or imputation we are still essentially only talking in *legal terms*. There are some folks who say that righteousness, for example, is only a legal word, only a positional word. It is simply a state of right standing before God, nothing more. But I think this verse is teaching us one more thing.

4. I believe that this verse is also teaching us the doctrine of *participation*. As indicated, this is where I part ways with typical commentators, so read very carefully. It is my contention that Christ, while not sinning, participated in experiencing the guilt and consequence of sin. Was He essentially changed in some way that gave Him real experiential knowledge of sin and its guilt? We do not know enough to say, but we may argue that He *participated*.

Smeaton, in his wonderful, classic work on the Atonement says something with which I strongly disagree. Speaking of Christ he says:

“He was never the object of the Father’s loathing or aversion, even when forsaken. He never was, what the sinner inevitably is, abhorred or abominable; because a distinction could always be made between the only begotten Son, the righteous Servant, and the sin-bearing substitute.”

I could not object more strongly. He experienced God’s abhorrence. We are dealing with far more than *legal pronouncements* here. We are dealing with some kind of essential impact on the nature and Person of Christ. Else, the words *knew no sin*, would not have been injected by Paul. Look at the verse one more time and notice the parallelism one more time:

*21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

We are dancing on the edge of infinity here, the edge where none of us can speak as authorities. In technical terms, we are prying into the mystery of the hypostatic union. As surely as the whole world lay in darkness for three hours during the sacrifice of Christ, so, just as surely, it seems as though our Father says to us, “*you may only delve so far into this mystery of all mysteries - this mystery of redemption. You will never be able to ferret it all out.*” For this reason,

misunderstandings can easily arise and we can damage the bud by forcing open the petals that lock in its secrets until the hour of the full blossom comes upon us. So, please, take great care in understanding my point.

I participated in that cross. I was there. Romans six tells me that I was placed into Christ and died *with* Christ. Romans six does not tell us that God sees me *as though* I had been in Christ. Romans six says I was in Christ. That is not just identification, that is not just substitution, and it is not just imputation. That is *participation*. I died in my sins in Christ. And this I believe, Christ *participated* in my sin experience so that I could *participate* in His righteousness.

I cannot say how this happened. We do not have the proper words in our vocabulary to express the truths we have already discovered, much less to articulate the truths about this miraculous event that we do not yet clearly see. How this happened, I cannot say, but *that* it happened, I am certain. The cross is far more than a legal transaction. It is the transforming event of history.

Are there extremes to avoid, yes! On the one hand, the *warm hearted enthusiasts* among us must never dare to say that Christ actually became *sinful*. We know this because of Peter's articulate argument in Acts where in 2:27 he quotes David's words concerning Christ: "*Because thou wilt not leave my soul in /hades/, neither wilt thou /allow/ thine Holy One to see corruption.*" God therefore, saw Christ as Holy when He went to the grave. So, we urge warm hearted enthusiasts must not go beyond what the Bible says in painting a picture of Christ becoming *sinful* in any way. The *cold, calculating objectivists* among us who resist emotional experience in any form must also be on guard. For there is not a one of them among us who can in any way decipher those words *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* We cannot plumb the depth of what Christ went through in that hour. And, if I was in Christ at Calvary, it was the *sinful* Jim Steel who was *in Christ*, that day. Christ participated at some level with me. How do I know this? Because Paul argues that when a believer takes a harlot to himself and becomes one flesh with her, he makes Christ a participator in this profane and abominable act. If I was at Calvary with Christ, He who knew no sin, still knew my "sinnishness." Is it any wonder that Paul ends with these words?

6:1 *We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.*

The most *monumental* event in history, the most *phenomenal* event is also the most *enigmatic* event! Christ was made sin for us that we could *become* the righteousness of God. *What wondrous love is this, Oh my soul, Oh my soul!*

Then, some Johnny-come-lately walks up and makes some *stupid, ignorant* remark like, "After all, all religions lead to God! All religions, basically, accomplish the same thing!" Such alleged spiritual teachers are fools and jackasses rushing in on an event that not even the tongues of angels can properly describe. Recently, I heard a man speak those very words. He was so arrogant and outspoken you could not even get a word in edgewise. All I could think of was "*Answer not a fool according to his folly.*" Have you defiled and profaned this cross? Are you hearing of this marvelous grace, all in vain? Have you despised this birthright for a mess of pottage? How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

## Mr. Ambassador

*Intro:* In the course of about a week we received news of two ambassadors who had undergone what we commonly call strokes. I am referring to Ambassador Harriman and Ambassador Brown. The first ambassador lost her life and we certainly offer our condolences to those who mourn her. The second ambassador did not lose his life because his task was not yet finished. And this is only the beginning of the difference between these two ambassadors. One is honored by the world, and one is honored by God. One lived a life of opulence, and one lives a life of sacrifice. While we are deeply appreciative of the efforts of Ambassador Harriman on behalf of the American people, I cannot help but bring to mind the words of Tom Brokaw as he reported our loss. I quote his words on Wednesday evening:

“Her life was cut short, but how fitting the end. She had her stroke just after her swim at the Ritz.”

I thought to myself, what a contrast for God’s ambassadors. And, that really is the issue on the floor. Until now, we have been comparing God’s ambassadors with earthly ambassadors. We have been emphasizing the *similarities*. By the end of this study, we begin emphasizing the great *contrast* as we start applying a new dimension and a whole new definition to the meaning the term Mr. Ambassador!

We have already learned of the ambassador’s message, this wonderful message of reconciliation. It is the message that Christ was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Beginning with chapter six, we see the ambassador in action. We *could* say that we are looking at a day in the life of an ambassador.

*2 Cor. 6:1 We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.*

### I. The Activity of the Biblical Ambassador.

#### A. From God’s point, he speaks as a *messenger*.

“*We then, as workers together with him...*” The Greek word is *sunergo* (syn meaning together and *energo* meaning work.) We who are ambassadors are *workers together* with God. And we must be very careful to understand just exactly *what* our part is. Our part is not to *create* the message, our part is to *deliver* the message. From God’s point of view we are His messengers.

This is the great watershed. I am willing to stand corrected on this point, but I do not believe there is another religion on the face of the earth that, in its sacred writings, calls its adherents *ambassadors*. I stress this because it truly *is* a watershed.

An article crossed my desk which contains some of the writings of “Dear Abby.” In a letter to Abby we read: “*Your answer to the woman who complained that her relatives were always arguing about*



*her religion was ridiculous. You advised her to simply declare the subject off-limits. Are you suggesting that people talk only about trivia, meaningless subjects so as to avoid a potential controversy? It is arrogant to tell people there are subjects they may not mention in your presence. You could have suggested she learn enough about her relatives' cult to show them the errors contained in this teaching." Abby replied "in my view the height of arrogance is to attempt to show people the 'errors' in the religion of their choice."*

Now, you see, Abby is correct. If all we are arguing is religion, it is a bit arrogant on our part to try to persuade others to change their thinking. But if, and *only if*, we are authorized ambassadors, bringing a message from the living God to men, then there is no arrogance involved whatsoever *on our part*. The arrogance, is on God's part! So, from God's perspective the ambassador is a messenger. He dares not alter the message. But then we notice the next important word.

*"We then, as workers together with him, beseech you..."*

## **B. From man's point of view the ambassador is an advocate.**

We then...beseech you. We have chanced, once again, upon my favorite Greek word, *parakaleo*, the paraclete word, the advocate word. The insurance man who comes into my home trying to sell me insurance does not want me to see him as a representative of John Hancock or Cigna. He wants me to see him as my advocate. He is there, beseeching me *on my own behalf* to accept his message.

That is the posture of the servant of Christ. That is the posture that you and I want to strike when we present this gospel. Do we speak with authority? Of course! Do we speak God's message and not our own? Of course! But, we come as *advocates*, as the *admonishers* who are rescuing a lost and dying world.

And so, let us remember this warning. If we stress either side too much we will lose our impact for Christ. If we speak so much as an authority that our listeners do not see that we are their advocates our message will harden the hearts of those who listen. If we speak with so much *advocacy* and *pliability* and *tenderness* that we obscure the *authority* our message, our listeners may not take us seriously. They may miss the point that this is the only path that leads to heaven.

The ambassador walks a fine line. He bears a message which he cannot change but he comes to the listener as an advocate. Now, notice:

## **II. The Approach of the Ambassador**

*"We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."*

We beseech *you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain*" This is an appeal for action. The word *receive* in this verse means to receive, very much as one would "receive" a visitor. Ambassadors are *received*.

It is not enough to *receive the visit and the message of the ambassador* politely. Many folks go to church on Sundays, and to just that. They grant an *audience*, so to speak to God's ambassadors, but they do not necessarily believe or receive the message to their hearts.

#### **A. The closer we can stick to biblical terminology the safer we are from biblical error.**

That is a good premise for life. For example, it is appropriate to speak of the deity of Christ. It is a term that certainly represents a biblical truth, but it is not a biblical term. If we would use the Bible's terms for the deity of Christ, we would emphasize the Sonship of Christ, and the Lordship (meaning His identity as Jehovah) of Christ.

Another term we use which has absolutely no biblical value and can lead only to disaster when we use it is the term *easy believism*. There is no such thing. The biblical idea falls under *believing in vain*, or receiving God's grace in vain.

It is a fearful thing to *receive the grace of God* in vain. The goal of the ambassador is not simply to *deliver* the message and wash his hands of the task. But rather, as the advocate of the listener, he admonishes him to respond to what he has heard. There are many thousands in churches across our land who have received the grace of God in vain. They have heard the message of grace, but have not made it their own. They have not responded to it biblically.

#### **B. We must also be careful to understand the right interpretation.**

The question of the moment is this, is Paul talking just to unbelievers here or is he talking to believers? I think it is fair to say that Paul is focusing on unbelievers. Just as is the case in most congregations, there were certainly unbelievers among the Corinthians who needed to heed this message. Paul was addressing unbelievers. We may fairly say that that is the interpretation of the passage. At the same time, we may rightfully make an application for those of us who know Christ who have been of little value to God or man in His service. Surely there is a sense in which such wasted lives make the ministry of God's servants a waste. Paul wrote these very sobering words in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:10:

*1Co 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

Has God's grace been bestowed upon you in vain? Are you a lousy investment? Have the efforts which God's people invested in you been in vain? Is your life adding up to a big fat zero in terms of what amounts for eternity?

We have seen the approach of the ambassador, as a man with God's message who comes as an advocate. We have seen the appeal of the ambassador; do not receive the grace of God in vain. Finally, look at:

### **III. The Attitude of the Ambassador.**

2 *(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)*

Do not let this verse go unnoticed! Ask yourself, why, ever, did Paul put *this* verse right here in *this* passage, at *this* time? What was Paul's intent? Was Paul simply delivering a message of urgency? Was he simply saying, you had better understand that *now* is the time when you need to be saved? Or, is the Holy Spirit doing something else through the pen of this writer? To grasp Paul's intent we have to dig down just a little deeper.

I heard two black teenagers having a conversation and the first said to the second, "Girl, you have an attitude!" It is my contention that this is an attitude verse, arguing the attitude we are to strike as ambassadors of Christ. Earthly ambassadors strike a posture of pride when they strut their stuff as ambassadors of their respective kingdoms. you and I who represent the King of kings, ought to be the proudest ambassadors in the world! We should never be shamed or humiliated by our high position.

But now comes the surprise, the contrast which I promised you at the beginning of this chapter. Here is how we differ from earthly ambassadors. Look at the verse one more time.

2 *(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)*

## A. What is Paul saying?

Our clue is in the first three words, "For he saith," That is an indication that Paul is quoting from the scriptures. In reality, he is quoting Isaiah 49:8 from the Septuagint Version, (the LXX) of the Bible. Turn to Isaiah 49 and look over the background so that you can *catch the attitude* of the passage.

You should recognize this passage immediately as one of the most critical of all prophetic passages in the Word of God. In these verses we have the Servant of Jehovah, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the person of Messiah, meditating on his *apparent failure* to bring justice to all the earth through the restoration of Israel. This conversation is for our benefit, not for Christ's. The question is asked so that we may have the answer and understand where we are in God's program. In verse 4 we have the statement of apparent failure:

4 *Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.*

Messiah's report of the Father's response begins in verse 5, and we continue with verses 6-8:

6 *And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*

7 ¶ *Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.*

8 *Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;*

Will Israel be restored? You can be certain! Will justice be brought in all the earth? As surely as the sun will rise tomorrow you can rest on that fact. First, Messiah must finish His task as the Servant.

## **B. Why is Paul quoting *this* passage at this point?**

On the one hand, Paul is likely reminding his Jewish listeners that Christianity is not an option. It is an imperative. He is reminding them that this is the prophesied *day of salvation* which will occur before Messiah fulfills His task of restoring the nation of Israel. On the other hand, he is reminding us all that we are not ambassadors in the same sense that earthly ambassadors are. As workers together with Christ, we are still *servant ambassadors*. Our King is still in exile. He has not yet brought justice into all the earth!

Why do we need to know this?

We need to know this so we know how to approach the world when the world cries out, where is God's justice? We need to know this so we will not bring *offense* to the ministry of messiah. Look at verse 3:

*3 Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:*

There must be offense, no *scandal* for the nation whom you represent! There must be no embarrassment.

We need to know this so that we will not be *surprised* at how *this world* treats ambassadors! That is what verses 4-13 are saying! We need to know, so that we will not become confused about whose side we are on! That is what verse 14 and the following verses are teaching us.

A number of years ago, San Francisco lost one of its favorite columnists, Herb Caen. In their inimitable style the San Franciscans turned his demise into an occasion for celebrating. I was profoundly moved by the words of Robin Williams who commented to this effect: He said if Herb were there with them they would be *having communion with sourdough bread and martinis*. And Williams went on to add, there is *no better way to see God* than with sourdough bread and martinis. [Applause]

I thought to myself, what trifling fools! It is insulting to Christ and His own take those elements that represent such sacred symbolism and use them as the basis for a joke. What trifling children! But I also thought to myself, what trifling children we are, who discuss such profound truths as we have presently discussed and yet take them so lightly. We are the ones who have been charged as ambassadors sharing in the servant ministry of Messiah, with great eternal consequences in the balance, and yet continue our ordinary day-to-day lives as though there is nothing at stake.

If you do not know Christ you are the mission field. If you know Christ you are the missionary, the ambassador. So, Mr. Ambassador! Do you see the picture?

## Ambassador Paul

Intro: The Sacramento Bee carried the following news clip which was simply too much to resist. I quote:

Woman sues psychiatrist - Appleton, Wisconsin. A woman is suing her former psychiatrist for malpractice, claiming he convinced her she had 120 personalities - and then charged her insurance company for group therapy. ¶ Nadean Cool testified Monday that the \$300,000 treatment by Dr. Kenneth Olson left her suicidal and haunted by false memories. ¶ Her supposed personalities included a duck, Satan, and angels who talked to God. ¶ Olson's lawyer says the psychiatrist's diagnosis was correct and no malpractice occurred."

Sometimes, Christians feel like they need group therapy for multiple personalities. We have the *old nature* tugging on us from the one side, and our desire to submit to the *new nature* on the other side. Part of our solution to this dilemma comes from understanding *who we are* in Christ. By understanding that we are *in Christ*, knowing we are seated with Him in the heavenlies, and by *appropriating our position in Christ*, we find great power available to us in our struggles here below. In other words, simply by realizing that the battle has been won, we can say no to sin.

But there is more – another aid in this struggle of the two natures is to understand that we are not only *in Christ*, but that Christ is in us - and that we have a common task. Our very work and service for Christ - the very absorbing of ourselves into His ministry – provides one of the greatest sanctifying influences of all in our lives. When we are busy serving Christ we are less likely to be struggling with sin. When we are absorbed in the Servant Christ – we are less likely to be absorbed with ourselves.

In our present passage we are going to gain some valuable help as we try to understand our role as servants and ambassadors for Christ. Paul is *leading us by the hand* into the walk of the *servant ambassador*. Acting, as it were, as an ambassador on our behalf, he provides a model for us, illustrating just how the ambassador is to conduct himself. One of the beauties of Paul's teaching found in the fact that he always *models* his instructions for us to observe.

In verses one and two, he has admonished us not to receive the grace of God in vain. In verse three he continues his exhortation:

3 *Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:*

We now straddle a precarious fence. Much more than just our own reputations are at stake. When we fail we present an occasion for *stumbling* to others who may be evaluating Christ through us. We do not want the name of Christ blamed or *mocked* by our failure to represent Him.

There is good reason why this is an important matter for myself as a Bible teacher. First, because our number one challenge in the ministry is overcoming the prejudices which the world has formed against Christians as a result of the reprehensible behavior of those who name the name of Christ. We are forever picking up the pieces. Christians who market their products trading on Christ's

trademark (usually, the fish) have done my ministry a great deal of harm and I seldom utilize their businesses.

Secondly, this is important because I am fearful of myself. I know how close to failure I am. I know how quickly my testimony could crumble. I know that pastors and Sunday school teachers and Christian servants are special targets of Satan. We *all* live on the brink of failure. And while repentance and restoration usually follows the fall of a leader and we may even be better off because of our failures, we do irreparable damage to the cause of Christ. We become the Swaggerts and Bakers and Tiltons of our day, and Christ becomes mocked, and the butt of bar jokes and talk show hosts.

Young person, when you walk out the door of your home into the school and the community you bear your name. If that is not enough to keep you from slipping, remember you bear your family name. And, most important of all, you bear the name of Christ. Did the language you used this week bring offense to His dear name? Did the pictures you looked at hurt Him? Did the jokes you laughed at? Did your conversation in the locker room bring offense to the name of Christ who was there with you?

What then is our goal? Paul notes it in verse 4.

*4 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,*

*In all things*; there must not be little concessions. There must not be silent areas, secret areas of non performance. We are to be approving in all things, commending ourselves *as the ministers of God*. We are to be testing our conduct in terms of the approval it will bring.

So that there will not be any challenges that his instructions have been too general and not practical, the Apostle generously provides 27 suggestions, in three groups of nine, in order to provide living examples as to how we can commend our ministries to God and man. And it doesn't take long for us to see that Paul is not talking about *theory* here. He is drawing from the wealth of his own personal experience as an ambassador. So, let's be *ambassadors in training* for a few minutes, and sitting at the feet of Paul, notice these practical suggestions given for our benefit.

When it comes to distinguishing our office from the worldly ambassador I have already noted that we have three arenas of nine descriptions, 27 descriptions all told, of the ambassador in action. A 27 point message is enough to make the heart of any self respecting preacher palpitate. We will not cover them in detail because Paul is painting a big picture, with a wide brush and he wants us to take the big picture home with us. not just a list of particular definitions. The first nine of these ambassadorial traits can properly be called:

## **I. The Ambassador's Great Patience.**

When we read in verse 4 that we commend ourselves with much patience we want to remember that that word for patience is much stronger in the original than in English. We are not simply talking about enduring, but we are talking about making progress in the battle. In fact, we Christians go so far as to say, where there is no *battle* there is never any *progress*. We do not shy

away from the fray as the Children of Israel did, desiring to make their own captain and return to Egypt. Rather, with Caleb and Joshua, we welcome the fray because our God is bigger than their giants.

Each of these traits where patience is to be exemplified are prefaced by the word *in* so that they are easily recognized. Beginning in 4b: in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings.

#### **A. The first three of these terms are *generalities*.**

Necessities are hardships, lacking the things considered necessary in life. Distresses are calamities. Now, afflictions, hardships, and calamities befall all of us. Great and small calamities fall on saved and unsaved alike. We all have bad days. Recently, I came across a note which went this way:

You know it's going to be a bad day when:

- \* You wake up face down on the pavement.
- \* You call suicide prevention and they put you on hold.
- \* You see a 60 Minutes news team waiting at your front door.
- \* Your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles.
- \* You turn on the news and they're showing emergency routes out of the city.
- \* Your twin sister forgets your birthday.
- \* You wake up to discover that your waterbed broke and then realized you don't have a waterbed.

We all have bad days because we are part of the human dilemma resulting from the fall. We all undergo small trials and great trials. None of us gets through life without trial. How we behave in front of the world when *our* home is flooded, when *our* disaster comes, is very important. But there are also afflictions, hardships, and calamities which befall us because we are in Messiah, assuming the position of the *suffering servant* with Messiah.

The first three of these terms are generalities.

#### **B. The second set of three represent specific *examples* of affliction:**

We read: in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults. Tumults are uprisings, or riots. Paul is now speaking from personal experience and these Corinthians know this. Paul is not asking these folks to adopt one practice while he adopts another. This ambassador for Christ is *an example*.

There is also a unifying characteristic in the last of the three sets. Colin Kruse points out:

#### **C. The third set of three represent specific *examples* represents hardships *voluntarily* undertaken.**

Observe: in labors, in watchings, in fastings. Some of the calamities of the ambassador come upon him *without* his invitation. Some of the difficulties come upon us because of our choice, because *we* give up our time, service, talents, and materials to forward the cause of Christ. The *watchings* here *may* be in reference to *watching and praying*, but, more likely, they are simply references to *wakefulness* and *sleepless nights*, the sleeplessness which comes about because of

our care and concern for others in ministry for Christ. The *fastings* referred to here may be in reference to a *spiritual fast*, but they probably do not. They are probably in reference to the voluntary giving up of meals that come because of the pressures of ministry, travel, and so forth. We cannot say exactly what Paul intended, but the point remains, these are sacrifices which the ambassador makes *voluntarily* in order to be seen and recognized as a servant of Christ.

## II. The Ambassador's Great Weapons

We have come to verses 6 and 7.

*6 By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,  
7 By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,*

Again we find elements in our list.

**Pureness** takes its root from the Greek *hagiazo*, and speaks of moral purity, chastity, and uprightness of life. Marriage *is* of course, holy, and the bed *is* undefiled, but thoughts, desires, and actions that lure us outside of marriage do more to defile and weaken the servant of Christ than any other activity. Purity must be a foundational stone in the temples of our character.

**Knowledge** takes on a new and stronger definition among Bible readers. This is because we know that the theatre of our warfare surrounds the issue of knowledge at every point. It begins with presenting men with a knowledge of who God really is and what His Word really says and goes right on applying that knowledge. Truth is our weapon. Facts are our weapon.

**Longsuffering and Kindness.** Everywhere from the traffic signal to the courtroom in which the Christian finds himself unjustly accused. These are key identifiers of the servants of God who walk in the footsteps of the servant Christ who went about doing good.

**Surrender to the Holy Spirit.** This is the racer's edge for the Christian. When that instinctive move has to be made and there is no time for thought, the soul is in touch with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life will more likely find the right words to say, the right direction toward which to point, the right counsel to give in the hour of crisis and the right words of encouragement, simply because he is in tune.

**Mighty weapons.** All of these, love unfeigned, the Word of truth, the power of God, the armor (or weapons) of righteousness, are worthy of studies in their own right. It seems, as we read this list, that we have amassed quite an array of weapons before our eyes. They are different weapons for different applications, and they are powerful. Our commander has not sent us defenseless into this battle.

Those curious words *on the right hand and on the left* catch our attention. Possibly, Paul was intending to show how *fully prepared* we are to face attacks from every side. There is a defensive weapon and an offensive weapon for every military action we encounter.



It is interesting that Paul characterizes the ambassador as being armed in any way. These are the descriptions of the soldier. It may be that Paul is reminding us that in God's army, everyone, regardless of his position or title, is still a soldier. Paul has again expanded the biblical definition of an ambassador. He is not only God's statesman and God's suffering servant; the ambassador is God's soldier as well. This challenge to be ambassadors carries a lot of responsibility with it.

At the same time, we must be extremely careful as we paint this picture of a warrior ambassador. His battlefield is not in the realm of social reform or political takeover. His weapons are not *carnal*, but *spiritual*. They are mighty to the *pulling down of strongholds*. The ambassador is an aggressor in a spiritual battle for the souls of men. He does not march with the crusaders to regain Jerusalem. This soldier of Christ finds his battleground is in the soil of men's hearts, and his weaponry is:

*6 By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,  
7 By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,*

We have seen the great patience of the ambassador described in nine different ways. We have seen nine great weapons of the ambassador. Now, we see:

### **III. The Great Anomalies of the Ambassador.**

Once again we find a list of nine contrasts or seeming contradictions. What we actually have are nine antitheses associated with the life of God's ambassadors.

*8 By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true;  
9 As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;  
10 As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

1. By honor and dishonor
2. By evil report and good report
3. As deceivers, and yet true
4. As unknown and yet well known
5. As dying and, behold we live
6. As chastened and not killed
7. As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing
8. As poor, yet making many rich
9. As having nothing, yet possessing all things

Do you know of any examples where Christians are being dishonored by the world today? We know the media wouldn't do it! We know that Hollywood never does it! We know the teachers at our local state universities never do it! It would not contribute to our purpose to serve up papers for court, to amass piece after piece of evidence, arguing to the court of your conscience that these very things are true of God's people today. But we shall let the verses stand, and we shall let the study stand just as it is with the awareness that if we are not experiencing some of these things, we are probably not walking as ambassadors. Instead, let's draw our conclusion with two admonitions, two reminders for us all.

First, don't be surprised when the world treats you the way it does. Be pleased. Be pleased that, somehow, in some way, you have brought honor to the name of Christ. Expect these anomalies. Expect these contradictions. When you are dishonored, remember you are honored in God's eyes. When you are unknown, you are known in God's eyes. When you are made poor for the sake of Christ, you are rich in His eyes. Do not be concerned what the world thinks. Keep your eyes on your Master's eyes and you'll do just fine.

Secondly, don't get caught up with the world's values. Don't be caught evaluating Christians the way the world does! If the world is honoring Christians, you probably *shouldn't* be! If the world is commending *your* stand, it is probably the wrong stand! Your riches are not a testimony to your obedience; your poverty is far more likely to be! Your success is not as likely to be a testimony to your obedience as your failure is! Be careful how you evaluate other *ambassadors* of Christ.

As this material is being written we have just re-elected a President who won his position, largely on the basis of the values he espoused. As a result, the liberal left is screaming. Michael Kinsley, one such liberal, wrote:

*It's been less than a month since the gods decreed that, due to the election results, American political life henceforth must be all about something called "values." And I gave it my best. Honest. But I'm sick of talking about values, sick of pretending I have them or care more about them than I really do. Sick of bending and twisting the political causes I do care about to make them qualify as "values." News stories about values-mongers caught with their values down used to make my day. - Published on Sunday, November 28, 2004 by the [Los Angeles Times](#)*

In this quote we see two sides of the values issue in relief. The world not only resents having values imposed upon it, it resents the double standards of those who say they espouse these values. God's ambassador must not claim political immunity when he is caught breaking the laws of the country in which he serves!

Determine, by God's grace that you will seek to be great in God's eyes, great as an ambassador, great in patience, great in spiritual warfare, and great in accepting the role of the suffering servant. If we do otherwise, amid all this noise and clamor, and amid all these charlatans and compromisers within and enemies of Christ without, how will *anyone* see who Christ really is? It is not enough to bear the message of Christ. We must be quick to bear His mantle.

## What Is An Unequal Yoke?

*Intro:* I need you to direct your immediate attention to the last portion of 2 Corinthians 6. In order to defend the point I am about to make I need you to read a few verses very carefully. We begin with 2 Corinthians 6:11:

*(2 Cor 6:11-13 KJV) O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. {12} Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. {13} Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.*

Now, *continue* reading at chapter 7, verse 2

*(2 Cor 7:2-4 KJV) Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man. {3} I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you. {4} Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.*

It requires very little observation on our part to understand that the basic theme of these sets of verses is the same. Paul is seeking to *reconcile* himself and his ministry to these Corinthians. The wording, the metaphors, and the argument is essentially the same. This is no astute observation. This is no puzzle. This is square one.

But there *is* a puzzle of sorts as we read over these verses. The puzzle does not relate to the verses which we read, but to *the verses which we did not read*. It *appears* to us, and I underscore that word *appear*, that the verses between our readings have been *inserted*. It is as though they are dealing with an entirely different subject. Notice these intervening verses, beginning with 6:14:

*(2 Cor 6:14-18 KJV) Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? {15} And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? {16} And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?} for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. {17} Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, {18} And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor 7:1 KJV) Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

This has prompted considerable discussion, especially, among those who do not like the message of separation that is being presented here. There are some who argue that these words must have been interpolated or inserted by well meaning scholars adding their own two cents into what Paul had to say. We shall not waste my time or yours refuting such idle speculation.

But, our challenge for this study is greater. As we begin with verse 14 and move down to 7:1 we are going to assume that, 1.) God the Holy Spirit did intend Paul to write these words and that, 2.) He intended them to be *exactly* where they are in Holy writ. We shall concern ourselves, instead, with the important question. What does it mean to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers?

How does this apply to you and me? Let's break our thoughts down into three key areas. First, we will look at the command itself. Then, we will consider how we should obey this command.

## I. Consider the Command Itself

The *command* is found in the first eight words of verse 14: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...* It leads to two obvious considerations. First, what does Paul mean by the label *unbeliever*? Secondly, what does Paul mean by the words *unequally yoked*?

### A. Unbelievers are those who are lost.

In answer to the first question, unbelievably, there have been numerous assertions concerning who the unbelieving are, and for students who would like to dig deeper I would invite you to look at William J. Webb's superb treatment of this passage. (See "Unequally Yoked Together with Unbelievers: Who are the Unbelievers (apistoi) in 2 Corinthians 6:14?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992) "For our purposes I will simply announce that we may rightly assume that Paul intended us to understand that unbelievers are the unsaved. Literally, the term *apistoi* means faithless. While Jesus did admonish Thomas not to be unbelieving or faithless, it is still generally true that wherever this word appears in the Bible, it is used in reference to the lost - not the saved. Paul always uses this word to depict the unsaved. We are not to have unequal yokes with unbelievers.

### B. The Unequal Yoke.

What does it mean to be *unequally yoked*?

1. Look at the actual word. The Greek term occurs *only* here. It is a compound word:

2086 heterozugeo {het-er-od-zoog-eh'-o} It is from the word *heteros*, meaning "another of a different kind" and, "zugos" which means *to join* (from which we get the English *zygote*). It is usually rendered *scales* (as in *balances*) or *yoke* - such as the kind of yoke which is put on cattle.

Simply stated then, the believer is not to be *yoked* with another kind - an unbeliever.

2. Look at its Old Testament use. It does not surprise us when Paul uses the Old Testament, especially when he turns to metaphors and figures of speech. We believe that Paul has done exactly that with this verse. Deuteronomy 22:10 and Leviticus 19:19 expressly forbid yoking oxen and asses together, or allowing the *gendering* or cohabitation of animals of unlike kind.

We do not have to work very hard to understand the principle of being *unequally yoked*. Believers and unbelievers are not to be *unequally yoked*. Period. Just as it is cruel to yoke different beasts of burden in a common yoke, so it is cruel to yoke believers and unbelievers.

So, far, however, we are not in too much trouble. The trouble comes when we ask the question, just exactly *when* does a Christian find himself improperly *yoked* with an unbeliever? Is there any way we can know more certainly what Paul is driving at? I believe there is, and this leads us to the second point of the study;

## II. Consider How We Should Obey this Command.

I like to make great noise over the fact that *you cannot get the right answer if you ask the wrong question*. In the passage under consideration *we usually ask the wrong question*. We say to ourselves “*What activity is Paul referring to when he tells us not to be unequally yoked?*” In fact, Webb, in another article on this passage brings to light the fact that there are *12 activities* suggested by interpreters. He says:

At least 12 options have been proposed as activity referents for  
της γιωνεσθε εθτεροζυγουντε/εφξεπλαθατε: (1) complete Qumran-like separation, with minimal social contact, (2) literal-physical idolatry, (3) metonymical idolatry, (4) metaphorical idolatry, (5) going to pagan courts, (6) visiting (temple) prostitutes, (7) mixed marriages, (8) eating meat offered to idols at pagan temples, (9) eating meat offered to idols at pagan homes, (10) speaking in tongues when unbelievers are present, (11) business partnerships, and (12) membership in a local pagan cult.

Now, Webb makes a very scholarly conclusion, which is closest to # 12 in the above list and his work is well worth studying, But, Webb is still *asking the wrong question*. The question is not *which* practice involves the unequal yoke? That is not the question at all. That question *assumes* that Paul was only referring to *one* practice and that it was either unlawful marriage, membership in a pagan cult, eating meat offered to idols, or whatever. The question is *not, which* practice is the *unequal yoke?*” The question is, *when does my practice become an unequal yoke?* If you ask the wrong question you will get the wrong answer. Paul is not referring to a specific *practice*; he is referring to a *principle*.

Now, let me provide you with some keys which Paul has provided in order to help us understand *when* we have an unequal yoke. The first key is in the next phrase:

### A. The Fellowship Key. Vs. 14.

*“...for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?”*

The word *fellowship* is the trigger. It is the Greek *metoche* and it simply means intercourse, or fellowship. The modern word *sharing* or having things *in common* would represent this word very well. There is no way under the sun that a believer and an unbeliever can share the same level of intimacy when one is righteous and one is unrighteous.

Good and evil have nothing in common. When a society loses its sense of right and wrong and of good and bad it is only a matter of time before it destroys itself.

During some past political scandals the American public was asked if it would make any difference to them in their thinking if it were positively shown that we had a communist spy working next to the President funneling money into his party's convention. Sixty one percent of the public said it would make no difference at all.

Good and evil do not take pleasure in each other. There is no *basis* for friendship when there is no common interest in righteousness.

Young people have been known to miss this point when choosing their close friends. They have the idea that it doesn't matter *who* their close friends are and that God doesn't care. But God does care. God says, when your friends do not care about righteousness, doing what is good and right, you are unequally yoked. There is an *unequal yoke* with unbelievers which occurs anytime our fellowship is not righteous.

## **B. The Partnership Key. Vs.14.**

*...and what communion hath light with darkness?*

The word *communion* is the trigger. In the Greek, this word is *koinonea*. It is a s-t-r-o-n-g-e-r word than the word we just examined above. *Koinonea* speaks of *partnership*. We might say that *metoche* (above) speaks of *association* and *participation*. But *this* word speaks of *commitment to the same cause*. This is the word which pictures being under the common yoke, working together.

You see, when two beasts are under a common yoke they work as one. Neither can act *independently*. When, then, does a *partnership* occur? A partnership occurs anytime someone else can act or speak on your behalf, or anytime you cannot act independently. A partnership occurs anytime you give up some of your authority, your right to act independently, to someone else.

This may occur in business. If you are a partner with an unbeliever you have allowed someone who does not share your position in Christ the authority to affect your testimony, your policies, your spending decisions, your marketing decisions.

This may occur in marriage. You see marriage is a partnership in every sense of the word. Whether you are the man or the wife you give up the authority to act independently. The other will often represent you, your position, and your testimony.

This may occur by joining a religious organization. Christians have no place or part in any organization where unbelievers can represent them and their testimony. When you are a member of a National Council of Churches church there are unbelievers who are speaking in your name and spending your offering money on ungodly and unrighteous causes. You must break that bond.

This unequal yoke on the partnership level can occur in many areas of your life, not just home, business, and religion. The key is in understanding that you are a partner when you are under a common yoke. When you cannot act of your own free will in some area of your life then you must not bond with unbelievers.

Why is this so? It is because light and darkness have nothing in common. You cannot take the risk of confusing them. Light and darkness are not friendly. They are not two sides of the same force. Light repels darkness. Darkness cannot exist where light is. Darkness is not the opposite of light; it is the absence of it. There are no two greater extremes. Not even hot and cold, are as different as light and darkness.

We have seen the *fellowship* for friendship key. Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot coexist. We have seen the *partnership* key. Light and darkness cannot coexist.

### C. The Harmony Key. Vs. 15.

*And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*

The word *concord* is the trigger. It is the Greek *sumphonesis*, soom-fo'-nay-sis; It actually comes from two words *sym* (meaning the same, or together) and *phone*, meaning sound. The modern English word *symphony* comes from this word and it certainly connotes the idea.

How can the believer and the unbeliever sing the same song? The believer echoes "*I have no song to sing, but that of Christ my King!*" Imagine, Christ and Satan in the same choir! After all, Satan *is* a great musician, you know!

This is one reason why mature Christians just hate it when Christian composers come along and make their songs look and feel as much like the world's songs as they possibly can. We see that as *discord*. We see that as an *unequal yoke*, because we do not want our music, our clothing, our testimony, or anything about us to be construed in any way with the world's values. That to us, is an *unequal yoke*. That is a formula for confusion.

What are we saying? We are saying that the cause of Christ and the cause of Satan will always be opposite causes, and *when we try to bring them together*, there can be no concord, no harmony. If you are a participant in any activity where the cause of Christ and Belial are at conflict, you are unequally yoked.

### D. The Ownership Key. Vs 15.

*...or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*

The word *part* claims our interest here. It is the *meris* {mer-ece'}. It means portion, or share. It is an *ownership* word. What does a believer own in common with an unbeliever? We do not own the same property. The unbeliever considers earthly property to be his own. The believer knows that whatever he controls really belongs to God. The unbeliever holds no real estate in heaven. The believer holds no real estate in hell. We are citizens of different kingdoms. Our currency is different.

Does this mean that we do not love unbelievers? Of course, we do, but we can find no cause, no reason under the sun, why we should be yoked to each other. Not even natural birth in the same family is a strong enough tie.

### E. The Identification Key. Vs 15.

*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?} for ye are the temple of the living God*

The word *agreement* is the trigger. It is the Greek *sugkatathesis* {soong-kat-ath'-es-is}, and interestingly, it is a political term, a voting term. This word is an *election* word. It means the putting together or joint deposit of votes, as in an election, hence agreement!

If you are a Democrat why would you want to be known as a Republican? You certainly would not campaign for a Republican president, if your desire was to see a Democrat win. It would be incongruous to do so. In the same vein, Paul says it would be foolish for you to aid the cause of idol temples when you are a part of Christ's temple! It would be the height of insanity. When you allow your identification to be confused you are unequally yoked with unbelievers.

The problem is we have still not found the keystone which puts all these building blocks together into one arch. We still do not have the continuity we need to understand this text fully. That continuity begins with the second sentence in verse 16 where Paul begins *freely quoting* a number of Old Testament passages which, at the first, seem to be important, but unrelated. Notice these words and observe that there *is* a thread which binds them:

*...as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. {17} Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, {18} And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor 7:1 KJV) Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

These are all verses which, when examined in their original settings, have to do with passages where God is calling upon Israel to remember her *covenant relationship* with God. The primary focus on God's covenant promises to Israel concerning His acting on her behalf *after* she comes out of the Babylonian captivity. This *is the unifying thread*. In the final analysis, what creates an unequal yoke with unbelievers? The answer is *any* covenant relationship that supplants our covenant relationship with Christ. Unholy covenant relationships are the unifying thread.

Anytime our fellowship with unbelievers supplants our New Covenant fellowship, anytime our partnership with unbelievers supplants our New Covenant partnership, or anytime our concord, participation, or agreement with unbelievers supplants our New Covenant relationship we have become unequally yoked with unbelievers. Why? It is because we are no longer respecting the covenant under which we are covered.

Is the unequal yoke with unbelievers related to marriage? Yes! Is it related to idolatry? Yes! Is it related to business partnerships? Yes! An unequal yoke occurs anytime a relationship with unbelievers supplants our covenant with Christ. Do you have any unholy covenants with unbelievers?

**In a summary, here are five keys to help us determine whether or not we are unequally yoked with unbelievers:**

A. The Fellowship Key. "...for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" If you are enjoying your relationships with unbelievers more than with believers you are probably unequally yoked...

B. The Partnership Key. ...and what communion hath light with darkness? If you have surrendered any of your independence and the ability to control your testimony to an unbeliever as in a marriage partnership, a business partnership, or a religious partnership, you are unequally yoked.



C. The Harmony Key. And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? You cannot blend Christ's cause with Satan's cause any more than Christ and Satan would sing in the same choir. If you are adapting your values and practices to the world's values, even if your motive is to win them to Christ, you are probably unequally yoked.

D. The Ownership Key or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Is there any part of your life which is so attached to the world and its ways that it possesses you? Are there any obsessions? Are there connections between you and unbelievers which compete with your relationship with Christ? If so, you are unequally yoked. E. The Identification Key And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?} for ye are the temple of the living God. Has your vote been deposited in the right ballot box? Are you aiding the temples of idols or the living God.

## My Heart, Christ's Home

*Intro:* Our goal has been to grapple with Paul's purpose and intent set in the words of 2 Corinthians 6:14:

*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers:*

We have been asking, *what does it really mean to be unequally yoked?* We said that we believe Paul has supplied five keys to help us unlock this principle and apply it properly to our lives. Please refer to our last study to review these important keys: The Fellowship Key, the Partnership Key, the Harmony Key, the Ownership Key, and the Identification Key.

These concepts regarding separation from unequal yokes are very much *under attack* in evangelical circles where all of these arguments have been set aside and flatly rejected. Christians who dare to suggest that fellowship with the world, partnership with unbelievers, concord (as it were) with the world's programs, and agreement represent an unequal yoke are laughed to scorn. They are accused of being unloving, and unfruitful in evangelism. Rather, we are taught that such fellowship, partnership, concord, agreement, and identity with the world is *the key* for winning unbelievers to Christ.

To the contrary, the Bible teaches that it is our *uniqueness*, our *separateness* which will bring men to Christ, not our *identification and similarity* with them in their sin. The Biblical doctrine of separation is at the very heart of God's program for His people in *every age*. It is a subject very dear to the heart of God and for that reason, we must look a little more closely at these verses before moving on in our passage. We must deal with one more aspect, lest we should leave without the proper imprint on our hearts.

In our last study we answered the question: *What is an unequal yoke.* In this study, we ask, *why is this an issue with God?* At the risk of being seen as *legalists* we must ask, *why does this issue transcend dispensations? Why is it argued in the Torah, and in the history books, and in the prophets, and in the gospels, and in the epistles, and in Revelation? What is the core of this separation idea? Why is this top drawer stuff with God?* We have already seen Paul's contention that it is illogical and contradictory to mix unrighteousness and righteousness, Christ and Belial, and the temple of God with idols, but Paul has not quite finished explaining *why* he makes this claim. For this, we read verses 16-18:

*(2 Cor 6:16-18 KJV) And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? [Here is the answer now:] for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. {17} Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, {18} And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

The first thing we must see is that:

## I. Separation Is About a Person

*...for ye are the temple of the living God*

*You*, if you know Christ as Savior, are the temple, the dwelling place, of the living God. This is no passing statement. This is no ho-hum assertion. This, in a word, is the dynamic of the faith. When we grasp it, we experience a profound consequence.

### A. The Temple had been vacated by God.

Temples have always been the supposed dwelling places of the gods. And while Jehovah God does not dwell in temples made with hands, He did meet with God's people in His temple, in days of old. He told Moses in Exodus 25:8,

*(Exo 25:8 KJV) And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.*

But those glory days were long gone. God had long since vacated. The Shekinah glory vacated both the temple and Zion itself just prior to the Babylonian captivity. And please keep in mind, for later reference in this study that this is *exactly* when this happened, just prior to the captivity.

### B. The Temple had been defiled *by all sorts of abomination, and even idol worship.*

Antiochus Euphrosynus, the most hated of all Old Testament antichrists even went so far as to sacrifice a swine at that temple and spread its fat all over the inside of it. This represented the ultimate defilement.

### C. We have now become God's temple.

This is an earth shattering thought. We understood very few of the implications of our salvation when we came to Christ initially. We were looking for salvation and forgiveness and eternal life, yes, but who would have ever dreamed of what plans God had for us! Who would have ever dreamed that God was going to reside directly in us?

When a woman cleans house she normally does a great job of it. She is far more efficient than a man in such matters, and the wisest of men will be careful not to say too much if some area of house cleaning should go by unnoticed by the lady of the home. There *is* a time, however, when you can be sure that nothing will be missed by the homemaker; nothing will go unscrutinized. That time is just prior to the coming of a guest. When a woman knows guests are coming she prepares for their presence.

That is exactly what Paul is reminding us about our temples. When the living God dwells within us, that is the time to be sure that the heart, mind, and body are as prepared as they possibly can be. Separation is about a Person. We are the temples of the living God. But, let's carry this one step further.

## II. Separation is About a Position

Continue with the middle portion of verse 16:

*...as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

**A. This new position was *prophesied*.**

“...as God hath said.” The Old Covenant could not make any such promise. But in Israel's darkest hour, when the candle of her hope burned the dimmest, when it appeared that all was lost, God was comforting, God was consoling, and God was promising His people that the day would come when this *would* happen. It was prophesied.

**B. This position was going to be *personal*.**

*“...I will dwell in you...” not just among you.*

We have been known to sing a beautiful little chorus which goes...

*Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me  
Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me  
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me  
Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.*

And I would not criticize the *intent* of that chorus for one minute. There are times when we all need to pause and ask the Spirit of God to freshen our hearts and restore our vibrancy and our walk. We enjoy quiet, humble personal times of refreshing. We all understand that. We all appreciate that. But there is a problem when we pray *Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me*. The problem is that that prayer represents what the Holy Spirit did under the Old Covenant, not under the New Covenant. There is no need for a fresh falling of the Spirit of God upon your life. You are the temple of the living God who dwells *in* you and walks *in* you.

**D. This position was going to be *powerful*.**

God said

*...I will dwell in them, and walk in them*

I will walk in them. God will go about performing His business in and through us.

Remember the days when Israel first balked at doing God's will. She was all lined up and ready to go in and claim the Promised Land, awaiting the return of the spies. You remember how she drew back from the *promises* and God had no pleasure in her. And then, doomed to experience the disciplining hand of God she suddenly reconsidered. The Israelites declared that they would arm themselves and go forward into the land and conquer it anyway! When they made this announcement, God spoke through Moses, telling them not to go. God said...“*I will not be among you.*”

And those are some of the loneliest words, the scariest words a man can hear. When the living God says “*I will not be among you...*” you are left in a pretty cold and lonely and empty spot.

When the decision to serve God is superficial and self serving, we can be sure that God will not prosper our efforts.

### **E. This new position was going to be *permanent*.**

While we do not know exactly where Paul was quoting from, we are certain that Jeremiah 31:31 was not far from his mind when Paul made this quote.

*31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:*

*32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:*

*33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

*34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

I can understand why someone who was living under the Old Covenant would have some doubts about his security in God. For while I am sure that no Old Testament believer ever lost his salvation, I am equally sure that he had a lot more reason to wonder if he *could*. They had seen and known a God who removed His *glorious presence* from among them. But, the New Covenant believer who begins to understand, in even the slightest way, what this new covenant is and why it came about, knows better. He knows that, at the very heart of this Covenant is a conversion which is so profound, that it actually results in a complete new heart being given to the believer. How any such believer could wonder about his security in God is beyond me. This New Covenant permanently changes anyone who comes under it. Everyone gets a heart transplant and there are no tissue rejections.

(Note: To be sure, we have not yet come into possession of all the benefits of this New Covenant. Among other things, Israel, the first benefactor of this Covenant, has not yet been converted. But we know enough. We know enough that we are participants in this new and wonderful covenant that God dwells and lives in us, and that He is our God and we are His people. We know that we are living temples of the living God.)

Follow Paul's logic to its close. Separation is about a Person. Separation is about a Position. Finally,

### **III. Separation is About a Process**

*{17} Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,*

#### **A. The first thing we learn about separation is that it requires an *action*.**

It requires a *coming out*... If we are required to come out of something it implies that we are already in it. The natural state is a defiled state. The natural state is a state of compromise. The natural state of man is a tolerant state, tolerant to sin. Separatists are often accused of being pious and self righteous as though we see ourselves as too good to fellowship with anyone else. We are not.

We are sinful. We are defiled. We are compromisers in our very nature. We prefer tolerance. We prefer to turn the other way. We prefer to ignore issues. We like to have friends. We want to be accepted. Why, then do we separate from the defilement of the world? We separate ourselves from defilement because we are now *temples*. We are now repositories of the presence of the living God. The One who lives within us hates sin in any and all of its expressions. We come *out* because of the One who came *in*. It is His fault we are separatists! He is the One who is ruining us for fellowship in this world. If He had left us alone we would be quite content to wallow in the pig pen with the rest of creation. So please do not see separatists as self righteous.

## **B. The second thing about separation is that it requires an *attitude*.**

*Wherefore, come ye out from among them and be ye separate...*

We find a clue in the very word *separate*. The Greek word here is *aphorizo*. It means, *to be set off by a boundary*. It means to limit, to exclude, to divide, and to sever. It is *not* a friendly word. Everywhere we look around us we can see the breaking down of boundaries. We see the mixing of light and darkness, of righteousness and unrighteousness, of Christ and Belial, and it has intruded into the very way we conduct our services.

Satan hates boundaries. He will attack them. He will argue against them at any and every point and every time we drive a stake in the ground he will call out a survey party to try to move it.

When a church says, here we stand on cooperation with unbelievers, Satan challenges it. When a church says, here we stand on cooperating with disobedient churches, Satan challenges it. When a church says, here we stand on worldly music, Satan challenges it. When a church says here we stand on alcohol, Satan challenges it. When a church says here we stand, *on any issue*, Satan will challenge it.

“Who are you to say? When did God make you the Holy Spirit?” They cry. “You are such legalists. You are so heavenly minded you are no earthly good. You are so cold and unloving. Everyone else is doing it.” In fact, every argument your teenager has given you as a parent has been given to pastors who have tried to set standards in any way in their churches.

When we drive those stakes into the ground we try our very best to avoid legalism and senseless standards which do not communicate Christ. When we set those standards we do everything we can to have *corporate agreement* among the whole congregation. But there’s one thing you need to know. When those standards are challenged a godly pastor should respond to that pressure by asking the Lord if those standards should be even tighter. There must be no doubt in anyone’s mind where a church stands on separation from fellowship with darkness.

Why are pastors so set, so determined, to set those boundaries where they can be seen and defined? The reason is this: God lives here. He lives in us. When Jesus Christ is in our midst,

we do not want to grieve Him in any way. We want him to be at home in our home. So, we keep a clean house for our guest.

Wherefore, come out — that is the action. Be ye separate — that is the attitude. Now notice the third thing about separation:

### **C. The third thing about separation is it requires *attentiveness*.**

*“...and touch not the unclean thing.”*

That is what I call attentiveness because this is what purity always demands. Unclean things were usually touched *accidentally* or, better, *incidentally*. They were not normally touched *intentionally*. A man became unclean because he encountered an unclean body, an unclean issue, or an unclean object. It was not that he had unnecessarily *sinned* when he touched something unclean; it simply meant that he had become defiled by virtue of his contact and that he required purification.

This is the spirit of the godly separatist. He does not want to be defiled. He knows that, at times, it is inevitable, especially if he lives in this modern world. But he exercises *attentiveness* in what he comes into contact with because he knows that *defilement is the first step* in disobedience.

A Christian knows that what he allows in secret, what he looks at, and what he desires in his fantasies will start a smoldering which leads to unpredictable flash points and uncontrollable outcomes. So he is attentive. He avoids contact with uncleanness even though he knows he has not necessarily sinned because he has touched something unclean.

We have a great God who sees into our natures and knows the kinds of struggles through which we go. He tells us how to navigate through the stormy waters. By avoiding defilement we avoid ultimate disobedience. It is God's way of helping to protect us.

We have a God who takes a great risk when He says, I am going to live in you! I am going to walk with you! I am going to work through you; that is what I will do! But He says effectively, you will only sense and feel my presence when you *act* by coming out from among them, when your *attitude* is one which sets boundaries between yourself and sinfulness, and your *attentiveness* protects you from the defilement of this age!

What a great God! What a great process! What joy comes into the life when the Spirit of God is free to Move and work in our hearts and the living God can express Himself through us! What heaven on earth! What ecstasy! What delight! And then, some Johnny-come-lately comes along and says that anyone who dares call himself a separatist must be some kind of fun hating legalist who likes to keep folks in bondage!

What will it be for you, Christian friend? And what will it be for you, dear unsaved friend for whom Christ died? The God of the universe wants to cleanse your heart and move into it!

## The Ties That Bind

*Intro:* At the close of many of our communion services we sing our benediction with the words of the old song which our fathers sang and their fathers sang, *'Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.'* There is no doubt in our minds that The Tie which binds us is, first, a Person. It is Jesus Christ, Himself. It was His prayer and desire that we would all be one, one in *purpose*, one in *doctrine*, and one in common *servanthood*. We are one in Christ.

The truth of the matter is that that effort to maintain unity and closeness is really an ongoing battle to which we are all called. It is not a natural state; it is a condition which is achieved in congregations. Sometimes that struggle is between church members individually. Sometimes that struggle is between church leaders and the congregation. It is such a struggle which we now witness. It is a struggle in the cause of *common fellowship*, *common partnership* and *common cause* for Christ.

We actually touched upon it three chapters ago when we read the words in 2 Corinthians 6:11-13. It was our intention at that time to return to these words after we treated the subject of *unequal partners*. We now make good our intent. But, be forewarned. We are dealing with matters of the heart. We are peering into the very personal and intimate communications between a man of God, the Apostle Paul, and his plea directed squarely to the *hearts* of his listeners. As Paul begins his impassioned pleadings we begin considering some of the ties which bind the leader and the congregation. Let's call the first tie,

### I. The Tie of Candor and Openness

*11 O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. 12 Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. 13 Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged. [Underline mine.]*

There is an *intensity*, a passion, a deep level of emotion revealed in these words. This not the command of a cleric, it is the plea of a lover who has been slighted by the objects of his endearment. This is an effort at reconciliation, an effort to gain back something which had been lost between Paul and the Corinthians. It is the reclaiming of a love which was going cold. It is tearful, it is personal.

The English words "*our mouth is opened*" actually represent a Greek idiom of the day which simply denoted candor or straightforward speech.

Our family always winces when we encounter someone in a conversation who says to us "*I am going to be honest with you...*" The reason we wince is that the statement implies that the speaker is not always honest at other times, and that he has chosen this occasion to come clean. It would be better if we said to each other "*I am going to be direct with you.*"



And when we speak of directness we also know there *is* a candor which does *not* bind the hearts of people together. There is a harsh statement of fact, there are unnecessary criticisms, and there are cruel perspectives given in the name of openness and honesty which are really cruel in their nature. That is not the kind of candor which Paul addresses when he says *our mouth is opened unto you*. Paul's open mouth was connected directly to an *open heart*. And, the man who opened his heart was hoping that his listeners would open theirs. Paul is telling us that he is not *framing or couching his words* in order to get a desired response. His speech is open and direct. It is to the point.

It is a wonderful thing when Pastor and congregation can be open and direct. It is a blessing when a pastor and people have the freedom to say what they are thinking to each other, because their hearts are wide open to each other.

The words *our heart is enlarged*, seem to be self explanatory. When we open our hearts we allow ourselves to be impacted with someone else, their needs, their emotions and their person. But here is the painful part of the lesson. Paul did not yet have such a relationship with Corinth. He was pleading for it. Look again at verses 12 and 13.

*12 Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. [or heart] 13 Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.*

This *condition of openness* between them did not exist. Paul was pleading for it as he struck the position of the reconciler. Paul could have chosen the easy path at this point. He could have said to Himself "*I will increase my level of intimacy with them when they are worthy of it. I will not risk casting my pearls before the swine. If these folks have closed themselves off to me will close myself off to them. After all, fellowship is a two way street. If they don't shake my hand I won't shake their hands. They must earn the privilege of intimacy.*"

That would be the natural response. But that is not the *ambassador's* response. The ambassador offers the olive branch in a most painful way. He does it by being transparent and open himself. He does this even though he knows that that very transparency could likely be used against him.

This is also true in the way we conduct all of our relationships. It is true in the way we handle our business differences. It is true in the way we handle our marital differences. The reconciler, the ambassador, always seeks a deeper level of intimacy, knowing that he makes himself vulnerable in doing so.

Marriage counselors explain that there are five noticeable levels of communication in a marriage. Level 5 is the cliché level, the "*How are you?*" "*I am fine, level.*" Level 4 is the reporting the facts level. Level three includes ideas and judgments. Level two includes sharing feelings and emotions. Level one is the *intimate* level where open thoughtful communication occurs. We communicate at all of these levels, but when trauma comes into the marriage, we begin drawing back. And it is *painful* for one partner in the marriage to determine that he is going to commit to a deeper level than his partner does. But that is where *healing occurs*. Someone has to start the process, open up, and take the risk. That is what Paul is doing. And Paul does this more than once with these Corinthians.

One of the ties which will bind us, then, is candor and openness. Look at the second tie which binds leaders and people together. We find it in chapter 7: verse 2..

## II. The Tie of Credibility and Character

“*Receive us.*” Literally, “*give us some space*,” probably space in their hearts. What *does* interest us concerning this command *receive us* is that its tense in the Greek is written in such a way as to demand action. It assumes that Paul is *not* being received. Paul is asking here for a *decision*. He is asking that *action* be taken, an action of the heart.

Pastors know exactly what Paul is doing. They know what it is like to discover that someone they loved and shared intimacy with was not really receiving them. When we pastors bring this on ourselves we need to deal with it like everyone else. There is often present, however, in our congregations, souls who are never going to accept a pastor’s ministry. They are always older and wiser and know how things should be and how the pastor is failing, and why the church is dead. And sadly, the time comes when pastors and boards and people must take action in order to root out that spirit of rebellion and discontent. Paul gave clear instructions on that point. But that is not where *Paul* started and that is not where *the pastor* should start. First, there is the loving plea, *receive us*, give us room in your heart.

Then, Paul cites three reasons why his ministry should be seen as a credible ministry with character.

**1. *We have wronged no man.*** That means that Paul has not unjustly injured anyone. Paul is probably speaking about injuring someone’s heart or conscience. He did not take unfair advantage of anyone at Corinth on his previous visit. Paul has not taken *personal advantage* of anyone.

**2. *We have corrupted no man.*** The word means exactly what it says - corruption or defilement. This is the same word which is used in Paul’s stern warning to those leaders who would corrupt or *destroy* God’s temple, His church. The Bible says that those who do this will be corrupted or *destroyed* by God Himself.

We puzzle about this and ask ourselves how does a servant of God get himself into such a position where his credibility is actually destroyed by his image as a corrupter? The answer is found in those who change their message and their emphases in order to enlarge their sphere of influence, and their wallet. Finally, Paul says:

**3. *We have defrauded no man.*** Paul has not taken advantage of anyone else for covetous purposes. He hasn’t sold his message. He hasn’t preached to the ears of his best givers. He hasn’t positioned himself in a way so as to make undue gain from God’s people. When a congregation cannot trust a pastor’s *integrity* and *credibility* they cannot accept His message. They will even suspect his Christ.

The ties which bind us are the ties of candor and of credibility and character. Now we add another tie.

### III. The Tie of Common Cause and Common Destiny

Examine the third verse:

*3 I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you.*

A rather curious phrase confronts us, *ye are in our hearts to die and live with you*. The truth of the matter is that Paul was neither living in Corinth, and he surely did not die with any Corinthians, as far as we know. The fact is that we have quite a set of our own idioms which we use all the time. If one spoke to you of a dark horse, that the pot can't call the kettle black, that sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, or a hundred other phrases, you would know exactly his intent. Of such a nature is this phrase, *ye are in our hearts to die and live with you*. In actuality, it was a common expression in ancient times. Colin Kruse says concerning it:

"In the papyri the expression 'to *live* together and to *die* together' is found where mutual friendship and loyalty are extolled. The idea is that those involved have such a friendship that will be sustained throughout life and will keep them together even if death is involved..."

The sharing of common cause and common destiny, even in death, is a profoundly intimate level of friendship. Perhaps, the way we would say it in our time is like this, *our hearts are in you, in this life and in the next*. Only those who are in Christ share such intimacy.

But, you may have noticed, Paul made a very interesting change in the common idiom as Kruse noted it. The idiom goes, to live together and to die together. But Paul said, to die together and to live together. That is because *this* is the true Christian outlook, the life of the cross, the life of suffering and the life of death is the life of the believer. We live by dying. We suffer now, for the glory which will yet be revealed.

When folks die and live together they share something in common with each other which the world does not share with them. There is a level of intimacy among God's people which others will not understand. We are a people of the common cause and of common destiny. We cannot afford not to be intimate with each other. We need to be in each other's hearts.

There is a final tie which binds us together in Christ.

### IV. The Tie of Common Comfort

*4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.*

All we have is each other. Our pride and our glorying is in each other's accomplishments. Our comfort comes from one another to one another. If we do not comfort each other we will not be comforted. The *world* will not comfort us in those difficult times and difficult hours. If we do not comfort each other, who will comfort us?

I remember those grade school days when I had the luxury of sitting under tutors. I could pontificate all I wanted about the quality of their teaching, about their subject matters and their research. I had that liberty because I was the student and they were the teachers.

Then, the day came when I became the teacher and I saw the other side of the coin. I saw students who placed little value on the quality of teaching they were getting. They were students who had the luxury of criticizing and pontificating, just as I once did. I understood what I had thoughtlessly put my teachers through. I had thought my teachers were somehow above all that. I never really sensed that they needed my appreciation and encouragement. I assumed they knew I appreciated them. I suspect that I thought they were at my educational disposal. I thought that there was an endless, exhaustless supply of them as long as I bellied up to the educational bar.

Pastors, leaders, and churches also lose their focus at times. On the pastor's side, it is easy to become impatient and weary of sheep. It is easy to lose the love and compassion, especially for sheep who hear the message over and over and over and never seem to change or grow. On the congregational side, it is easy for congregations to assume that they can somehow treat the one who gives himself for them as a disposable commodity. They can devalue the quality of preaching and teaching they are getting. They can misinterpret and resent the strong stand, like teens resent the strong guiding hand of a father in the home. Like sophomores, they can rise up as the experts who know all the failures and flaws of the one who teaches them.

One solution for such a problem is to break the ties and let the member move along to another church where he can cool his heels until he becomes dissatisfied with another pastor. Or, another solution would be to let the pastor move along to another church where he can cool his heels until he becomes dissatisfied with another congregation. But there is another solution; we can *strengthen* the ties which bind us.

We can strengthen the ties of candor by opening our minds and hearts and sharing with each other what we really are and feel. We can strengthen the ties of credibility and character by never allowing the deprecation of anyone's character or trustworthiness. We can strengthen the ties of our common cause and destiny by sharing the same yoke and realizing that all we have is each other. Finally, we can strengthen the ties mutual comfort and encouragement.

The choice belongs to any pastor and any congregation and any church member. The choice is ours. The level of intimacy at which we choose to live is entirely under our control.

## Recognizing Repentance

*Intro:* There is a chorus in the Wild's Camp hymnbook which is elegant in its simplicity. It is simply entitled *Obedience*. Obedience is the very best way to show that we believe. It is really the stuff of the 2 Corinthians 7, the chapter in which we are presently engaged.

We have managed to gain a glimpse into the life and practice of Paul. It is though we have a free-standing slice of his life. We cannot say with authority what prompted Paul's comments in this chapter, and therefore, you may even be disappointed at my lack of historical treatment of the background. I just do not feel we have enough information to form too many historic opinions. We may not be absolutely sure just who was under discipline or even how many were under discipline. At one point we are quite certain that it must have been regarding *the individual* involved in the terrible fornication we learned about in 1 Corinthians 5. For example, verse 12 of chapter 7 indicates that a specific person is involved. At other times it appears that it is *another* individual, and that a large number of folks in the church had been effectively under Paul's discipline, either for not disciplining the sinful man, or for other idolatrous practices. The history of the matter is not the focus of this message.

What does occupy us as we look at this *slice of the pastoral life of Paul* is to recognize what true obedience is for the church leader, for the church family, and for the one or ones being disciplined when such occasions inevitably arise. The first thing we must understand is:

### I. Biblical Obedience Brings Anguish into the Life. Vs. 4- 6

While we sing "*Trust and Obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus...*" we must also confront still another reality. When a man decides to obey God there is always a cost. He is not always *immediately* gratified. In verses 4-6 we read:

*4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.*

*5 ¶ For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.*

*6 Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;*

There are Christians among us whom I call the "No Fear" Christians. They are the ones who deny the reality of the Christian walk with their truisms, maxims, and pontifications. If you are *fearful*, you are not trusting God because perfect love casts out fear. If you are *struggling* with issues within yourself your discernment is weak. If you are *troubled* with attacks from without, your God is too small. These folks preach a doctrine of Christian Nirvana, that our ultimate goal in life is not to be affected by any emotion. They equate spiritual victory with emotional insensibility. Don't you believe them for one minute! They are the greatest liars of all because they are unknowingly lying to themselves and their little faith games have turned led them down the path of denial.

The man who obeys god will *always* find himself in the struggle. He will *always* find himself questioning his own wisdom and his own submission to God's will. He will *always* be grappling

with fears from within and without. And the harder one tries to obey God the more intense those struggles will become. Obedience to God never brings relief from the struggle; it only *adds* more struggles and more questions to be resolved. Even so, they are struggles and questions which lead to great eternal consequences and to a glory which will yet be revealed. They are worthwhile struggles.

The second thing we need to see in this set of verses is that:

## **II God Plays *His* Part When We Practice Biblical Obedience**

*“Nevertheless...” - Paul says - “it is GOD who comforts us...”*

God is the one who comforts us. If we were to Romanize this word from the Greek we would say He “*paracletes*” us. He is the one who *comes alongside* of us in this struggle for obedience and admonishes us to do the right thing. This is why we welcome the struggle, the trial, and the anguish of soul. Worldlings may observe and sense the working of God from a distance but they know nothing of this *parakaleo*, the comforting, guiding hand of God in their lives. When God calls a man, woman, boy or girl to *obey* Him He *always* says, I am with you. He always comes alongside. He always encourages. He always enables. And the sweet joy of feeling the comforting hand of God in our lives makes the anguish of obedience a pleasure. Thirdly,

## **III. God Often Uses His Children to Encourage Those Who Are Obedient.**

*In this case God used Titus. And not just Titus, this giant of a son who was every bit an equal to Timothy, but Paul says in verse 7:  
7 And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.*

Paul was also comforted indirectly by the response the Corinthians had already shown to Titus when Titus visited them. Already, the report had come back that these Corinthian believers had responded *positively* to the rebukes of this Apostle. Their earnest desire, their mourning, their fervent minds toward Paul were all evidences that the Holy Spirit of God had been working in their lives and in their assemblies!

Do you want to encourage your pastor and leaders? Let them see the evidence of the working of the Spirit of God in your life. That makes the anguish and the struggle all worthwhile! Let them see *your* desire to obey God. Now, notice also:

## **IV. God Expects Us to Demand Biblical Obedience from Each Another**

*8 For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season.*

### **A. It is never a pleasure to be the one who has to assert the discipline.**

He has little to gain in the process. He will, most likely be misunderstood by disinterested onlookers. He will be exploited by his detractors, and he may be resented by those whom he seeks to discipline. Furthermore, no one likes to bring pain into some one else's life. One cannot discipline without bringing sorrow into another life. No one can discipline without feeling that he himself is not qualified for the task. He risks being seen as self righteous and condemning.

## **B. There is a joy and a reward when those who are disciplined do respond and repent.**

*9 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.*

This is why we read in Hebrews...

*Heb 12:11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

When the disciplining process is successful, present sorrow yields future fruit and eternal rewards. Paul stops, here, however, and injects a warning for us. He wants us to *think* about this matter of repentance. We cannot simply pass it off with a wave of the hand:

## **C. We have not obeyed God when we repent the way the *world* repents.**

*10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

**There is a *godly* sorrow.** There is a sorrow which brings about the *work* of repentance to salvation or deliverance. In the case of the unbeliever this work of repentance is what leads to the salvation of his soul. In the case of the believer, this work of repentance leads to the salvation of his body, his future, and his walk with God.

**There is an *ungodly* sorrow.** There is a worldly sorrow which must *never* be confused with godly sorrow. I stress this because of the terrible consequences of confusing it with godly sorrow. This sorrow works death. This sorrow works eternal death for the lost. This sorrow works physical death for the saved. It is important to notice this because the whole doctrine of repentance has been reduced to ashes by those who would rationalize it away. It even comes as a shock to some believers that God expects us to be *sorry* for our sins. For some Bible teachers the simple mental *acknowledgment* of our sinfulness is sufficient. There does not need to be any emotional interaction, no reflection on our vile deeds and vile natures. They would like to turn this whole discussion of repentance into a legal transaction and they are quick to suggest that *any hint of the necessity of sorrow* for our sins is tantamount to requiring some kind of work for our salvation.

That is because they are focusing on the wrong word. They are focusing on the word *repentance*. To repent simply means to turn again or to turn away. Look at the verse again. *Godly sorrow leads to repentance to salvation*. There is such a thing as godly sorrow. The word for sorrow here is the word for sorrow, pain, grief, annoyance, and mourning. The Psalmist says...

*Ps 38:18 For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.*

True sorrow results in the declaration of our iniquity. Sometimes declaration involves enumeration and enunciation. Sometimes it is simply a statement of our soul's condition, but the declaration of our iniquity results from true sorrow over our sin. There is, then, an ungodly sorrow.

There is also a worldly repentance. It is a worldly repentance because it is based upon a worldly sorrow. It is genuine sorrow, but it is worldly sorrow in its nature. Worldly sorrow weeps because it was caught. Worldly sorrow weeps because there is a price to pay for sinning. Worldly sorrow even includes sorrow over the fact that others have been hurt by our disobedience. But worldly sorrow is not *offended by the sin*, it is hurt only by the consequences of the sin.

#### **D. We must be able to discern between true and false sorrow.**

1. Are you *willing* to discern? Are you willing to demand true repentance? Or do you *want* to be fooled? John Baptist saw his share of false sorrow. We read in Matthew 3:

*7 ¶ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:*

The truth of the matter is that many pastors, board members, teachers, parents, and authority figures are so *uncomfortable* in the discipline process that they do not really want to test the offender for *true repentance*. They want out of this situation which is ruining their day. They do not want to risk their well being, their jobs, their friendships, and their own emotional well being. They simply can't handle confrontation. They can't do it! So they grasp at straws for the tiniest hint of anything which looks like repentance and pronounce the offender forgiven at the first waving of a white flag. We are not looking, however, for the white flag of truce; we are looking for the blood red flag of surrender to the cross.

Has anyone ever asked *you* to produce or identify the fruits of repentance? What are these evidences? What are these fruits? Do you suppose those Sadducees and Pharisees cried big crocodile tears out there by the river Jordan? I'll bet they did! Do you suppose they made loud groaning noises? I'll bet they did! Do you suppose they made long speeches of repentance? I'll bet they did! Do you suppose they made long speeches of repentance? I'll bet they did! Do you suppose they even returned with offerings and sacrifices to the temple? I'll bet they did! Do you suppose they repented? *I don't think so!* Do you suppose they were forgiven? *I don't think so!* Why? Because the fruits of repentance were simply not there.

The first question is, are you *willing* to discern between godly and ungodly repentance? The second question is:

2. Do you know *how* to discern between true and false repentance? If you are relying on the flesh and your natural instincts you will fail. If you are not prayerful in this matter or you are not in the Word of God concerning this matter you will fail. If you are *confused about your own obedience* to God and are hiding sin in your own life you will be weak and ineffective when God calls upon you to be strong. If you cannot discipline your own family and you cannot discern your own heart you will be blind when God needs you to discern.

So then, how are we going to discern between true repentance which leads to salvation and false repentance which leads to death? You say, how then, can we recognize the difference between



*worldly* sorrow and *godly* sorrow? God does not leave us without guidelines. Paul asserts them in this very passage. Look now at verse 11:

11 For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

What did sorrowing after a godly sort produce?

**a. "...What carefulness it wrought in you."** Carefulness, in this case is deliberation. It is diligence. It is haste. Godly repentance no longer vacillates; it does not struggle about going into the bar. It does not walk down the other side of the street from the bar entrance. Carefulness walks down another street.

A person who repents from alcoholism does not keep a bottle in the cupboard or under the truck seat so that he can convince himself that it is his choice whether to drink or not to drink. A man who is trying to overcome alcohol may do that. A man who repents of drinking hates to touch the bottle that brought him to the brink of hell. The smell of alcohol is to his soul the smoke of hell billowing up into his nostrils. That is godly sorrow. This carefulness is not *because he has the victory*; it is because *he hates the sin*. And, in hating the sin, he will ultimately find victory. Alcoholics Anonymous groups have helped many free themselves from the bondage of alcohol and they are to be commended for that. However, AA groups do not teach men to *repent*. They, therefore, must announce for the rest of their lives that they were, and are, and always will be alcoholics. They can only find relief not release.

**b. "...yea, what clearing of yourselves."** It does not require and special scholarship to understand what it means to *clear* yourself. It means to *own up*, to *accept responsibility* for your sins and to seek to make every effort to redress and repair any of the consequences of your behavior which you possibly can. It is an evidence of true repentance when, instead of being admonished to reveal your problems you have to be admonished to stop revealing them. Sin thrives in secrecy. Sin thrives where accountability has not been established. When a man *clears himself* he is re-establishing lines of communication, lines of authority and lines of accountability. He wants this sinful behavior off his chest. He wants release. And the more a man clears himself the more he discovers a new hatred and dislike for what he was doing.

The Greek *apologia* can be rendered *defense*, or *giving an answer for oneself*. The man who *clears* himself is not defending his sin; he is defending himself from his sin. He protects himself by revealing the true facts and conditions of his soul. It is a wonderful step in healing.

There is a difference between *clearing ones self* and simple confession or enumeration of a list of sins. Paul is speaking of an impetus here, a drive to "get shed," as they say down south, of the problem. Something inside makes us want to let others know. That is clearing. It is very different from demanding public confession from some offender.

**c. "...what indignation, yea what fear."** Indignation carries with it an intonation of anger, of vexation. It is the result of a man who has begun to realize just *what sin costs*. A man becomes indignant when he has been defrauded or stolen from. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and opens the eye of the sinner as he begins to resent and regret what he has lost. There is an anger

which arises because Satan and his demons have robbed him. He has been suckered and deluded while being led off captive like a prisoner and a fool. Now, the time for anger has come. It is a good anger because it is focused on his sin and the damnable foolishness of it all.

*What indignation, what fear!* It is wholesome, healthy fear and it is not just fear of the consequences. Ungodly fear produces that. It is the fear that he will fall again into this snare and these vice and fear that his sons and their sons will pay the price of his sinning. His fear is that others will be turned away from Christ, and fear that he could be forever castaway. Not terror concerning the dispensation of one's soul, for we have already learned that godly sorrow produces deliverance, but a holy phobia a terror that we, being so weak could slip once again into this hellish pit of slime from which we are being rescued.

**d. “*what vehement desire.*”** That is zeal. When a man is caught up in sin he is often caught up with a zeal which wants to invite others to share in his disobedience. When a man is rescued from his sin one of the purest signs of repentance is that he wants to become a missionary, warning others that the stove is hot! The fire burns! The temptation is an illusion! The harvest is death, sorrow, and tears. A true repentant is often so obnoxious about his zeal that we have to tone him down. His repentance has gone beyond simple sorrow. He truly wants to spare others. This is not the zeal of a planned statement to be read in front of a board or congregation. This is the kind of zeal which surfaces instantaneously whenever occasions or situations arise which give rise to his anger against sin and his anger against the ravishing of his own soul. Worldly sorrow does not produce this. It produces only carefully worded pretenses, prepared statements, and token remarks strategically placed. The burning hatred for what we have done does not ever evidence itself in worldly sorrow over sin.

**e. “...*yea what revenge.*”** Revenge here means full punishment. I see that as the phrase which sums up all that has gone on before. Godly sorrow cuts the *umbilical cord* with the womb of secret desire. It scours the house of the soul for any evidence of leaven. Godly sorrow produces a day of atonement for the soul which forever changes that man.

When someone comes to you waving the white flag of worldly sorrow and you accept it as a token of his sincerity with some passing misquote such as “We must take the man at his word,” or “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone” or “The whole need not a physician...” would you please consign yourself to the fact that you have probably just destroyed a soul for whom Christ died. Don't you buy it

What is our goal in discipline? Our goal is Paul's goal. Our desire is to experience the same success Paul experienced. We want to be able to say what he said:

*In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*

That is the goal. That is the end of discipline. But that is not the only goal. Our purpose is not just to rescue the offender. In fact, according to the Word of God, that is not even our primary goal. We end with verse 12, where Paul makes a most interesting revelation:

**V. The Requirement to Demand Biblical Obedience is First for Our Benefit and Secondly for the Sinner's Benefit.**

*12 Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you.*

Discipline is not simply for the offender. Discipline is not simply for the one who suffers the offense. Discipline is for the cause of the body of Christ. This is why we *put away that wicked person*. This is why we *purge out the leaven*. This is why we *mourn*.

## The Grace of Giving

*Intro:* As we approach the eighth chapter of 2 Corinthians we encounter one of the richest portions in the Word of God dealing with the matter of Christian giving. It is loaded with good, helpful information which, properly understood, can save us from a world of misunderstanding about this sensitive issue. I read the following story from a 1989 Readers' Digest:

Our church held a Sunday service patterned after those in Colonial America. The pastor dressed in a long coat and knickers, and the congregation was divided by gender: men on the left side of the aisle and women on the right.

At collection time, the pastor announced that this, too, would be done in the old way. He asked the "head of the household" to come forward and place the money on the altar. The men instantly rose. To the amusement of the entire congregation, many of them crossed the aisle to get the money from their wives.

Times have changed since those colonial days and so have many of our attitudes on giving. Discussions on giving can become very animated, especially when the magic word "tithe" is entered into the formula. Very often those who *do* tithe do so for all the wrong reasons and virtually place themselves back under the law (self righteous at the worst, in bondage to a legal system at the best). Those who defend their biblical freedom and do not tithe arguing that we are "*under grace*" are, strangely, the most miserly of spiritual freeloaders in the Christian community, rarely matching the tithers, much less really giving as the Lord has truly prospered them. They also have failed to understand that giving *is* a grace. One fact is sure, as soon as the word tithe enters the picture we have everyone's attention, including the added ranks of self righteous unbelievers who are just waiting on the sidelines to point out the money rakers.

I have chosen to use the old "one-word" outlining technique and the letter "E" will be my letter of choice as we *Evaluate* what God has to say about this grace which we call giving.

### I. The Existence of the Grace of Giving.

*8:1 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;*

Giving *is* a Grace. Paul is highlighting the Macedonian churches as examples for the Corinthian church to follow. Macedonia represented the area we associate with northern Greece. Some of the Macedonian churches included Philippi and Thessalonica, and Paul may have been referring to the Berean church as well. We will understand *why* they were such good examples momentarily, but the thought which catches us is the fact that Paul labels *giving* as a *grace* bestowed by God. Giving is a *grace*.

Bible students will be quick to recognize the uniqueness of this word *charis*, (khar'-ece;) which is used with the English words grace and gift. It is associated with pleasure, favor, and delight in its

use. The word “*charis*” *matic* or grace gift includes it. Giving *is* a grace. But what is this teaching us?

### **A. This *grace* is a favor which is *bestowed* upon us.**

God *bestows* this wonderful gift upon his children. We are tempted to think of giving as something which *costs us*, but in truth, it is something which *favours us* and *enriches us*. What we have is God giving us the ability to be givers. Look at verse 16 in this regard. Paul says:

*16 But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you.*

God is the initiator. God put the burden in Titus’ heart to minister to the Corinthians. God motivates us in all of our ministries. It is a wonder and a delight when God brings a need to our minds and compels us to fill it. To be used of the King in meeting the needs of others is grace, it is favor, and that is high privilege. This is no burdensome stone which has been strapped to our shoulders.

When I was a child and the day came when I was allowed to hold a paint brush by my father, I rushed with glee to the task. I did not see it as work. I saw it as a right of passage. I saw it as privilege. That is how we should view this ministry of giving. When God stirs our hearts we *rush to give* before the privilege is taken away from us or wretched *common sense* robs our faith. We should be delighted that our Father has let us pick up the paint brush.

I have seen many of God’s people rise quickly to the cause of giving when a need has been revealed. I have seen this grace alive in so many of my past church members, and I delight in the God who has given it to them. God gives us the unction to give and it is a delight when He does so. Giving “hilariously,” is much like getting up the nerve to jump off the diving board. Once you do it a time or two the pleasure and the joy of giving replaces the fear of not having enough to meet your own needs.

### **B. That this *grace* implies divine enablement.**

Grace is not just a state of mind. Grace bestowed always implies grace enabled. It implies *ability*. In the opening of 1 Corinthians we learn from Paul that grace provides the enablement for *all* of the spiritual gifts. In Galatians 1:9 Paul explains that his call to the ministry was an enablement of grace and he says the same thing in Ephesians 3:7, and later in the next chapter of 2 Corinthians we will read these words:

*8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:*

For the believer, grace is divine enablement. God enables us to be generous and liberal. It is not a natural instinct in the selfish nature of man.

### **C. A *grace* is not to be confused with a spiritual gift.**

It is true that both must be stirred up and both must be disciplined. Both are divine enablements, but there is a difference. A *grace can be prayed down upon people*, in fact, it usually comes as a

result of prayer. Grace may be sought in the time of need. It may be wiser to seek grace than patience, for patience comes with a price tag! Grace is given out generously and in great abundance. Spiritual gifts, in contrast, are carefully measured out by the Holy Spirit in operations, administrations and in exact accord with what our life ministries will demand. Gifts were given to the whole body at the resurrection. They are positional. Grace is for the moment and abounds in superabundant stores. But grace *is* a gift from God, a divine enablement.

We have learned that the principle of grace giving is a much higher principle than the principle of simply giving out of obedience, because grace giving is a dynamic set afire in the heart by God Himself, a divine favor and privilege which He bestows on those who seek it. Giving truly is a grace.

## II. The Enhancement of the Grace of Giving

This may seem like a strange label for verse two, but just take a look at the verse and the point should become clear.

2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

The irony of this verse jumps out at us. It is the *trial of affliction* which produced the *abundance of joy*. It was their *deep poverty* which abounded unto the *riches of their liberality*.

I read the story of a terrible flood which gripped Appalachia. After much effort, the Red Cross got to the door of one of the victims who had been hardest hit. Upon identifying themselves, the man responded, "*I am so sorry, things have been a bit worse than usual this year. I don't think we're going to be able to give anything!*" It hadn't occurred to the man that he was the victim. He was only disappointed because he couldn't contribute.

That is the way it often *is* with those going through great trials and affliction and great poverty. They are the first to open their meager purses. They are the widows with the mite. They are the ones who give of their substance while the rest of us give out of our surplus. The wealthy are the ones who have learned the habits of hoarding. They have learned to look at the poor and pity them for not being better money managers! They are not *moved* by suffering.

The grace of giving is *enhanced* by our affliction and our poverty. It comes alive in us when we suffer. I would to God that our stock market *did* crash. I would to God that He would reduce us to poverty so *that we might be enriched*.

According to a Gallup survey, almost half the total charitable contributions in the United States come from households with incomes of less than \$30,000.

Just think of how much better the Lord's work would do if He would reduce our annual incomes to 4 or 5 thousand dollars! In any case, here we have the Macedonian churches, struggling under fierce opposition and persecution in extreme poverty, giving generously, while the financially stable Corinthian church (free of immediate persecution) is wracked with internal problems and undisciplined in its giving.

### III. The Extent of the Grace of Giving

*3 For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;*

It is one thing to give what we *can* afford to the Lord's work. It is another thing to give *more than we can afford* to the Lord's work. These Macedonians had done all of that and were still struggling and searching for ways *beyond their power* to give! When the grace of giving takes over in the life it never asks, how little can I get by with giving? It always asks, how much can I get by with giving? It is a mindset which starts with wishing we could give it all away, and reasons back to reality. Like the young French soldier who woke up on the operating table after losing his arm. The surgeon gingerly said "*I am sorry to tell you that you have lost your arm.*" "Sir," said the lad, "*I did not lose it; I gave it, for France.*" That is the spirit of sacrifice.

And then, just about the time some dear man of God begins bringing these wonderful truths out of the Word of God someone comes along and says "*After all, God only expects us to do what is reasonable and proper.*" Scripture says that it is reasonable and proper to want to give everything we have.

### IV. The Expression of the Grace of Giving

*4 Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*

The verse is interesting to us because it raises the whole discussion of giving to such a high level. This is not the picture of spiritual leaders begging their congregations to give. This is the picture of congregations begging their leaders to accept their gifts! This is the mirror image opposite of what occurs in most ministries today. And there are keys, secrets locked up in this verse, which help us understand why these Macedonians had arrived at such a high conception of what giving really is:

#### A. They understood the concept of *mutual encouragement*.

This is locked up in the word *entreaty*. "...*Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift...*" You may have guessed that the word *entreaty* is a form of the word *parakaleo*. These early believers were *proactive* in *parakaleo*. They had learned the habits of *interactive involvement*. They knew that their own strength came from the admonition, encouragement, and comfort of others. They needed to be able to participate in the lives of others. They knew the secret of *parakaleo*, and were practicing it.

#### B. They understood the concept of *mutual fellowship or partnership*.

They besought Paul's team to take upon them the *fellowship* of this gift. That is, of course, the Greek word *koinonea*, and it implies a common yoke, a common partnership. In secular terms,

they wanted to buy in to the business. They wanted to invest in this common cause. They wanted to invest because they believed in the outcome. They wanted to share the burden so they could share the joy. When a man invests in the Lord's work he is not paying for services rendered, He is investing in future shares. He is a partner in the greatest investment firm on earth.

### **C. They saw this as mutual service to God a mutual ministry.**

Paul calls it the *fellowship of the ministering to the saints*. Ministering is the word from which we get *deacon*. It means to *serve*. Giving is servanthood. When we serve the saints we serve God. These Macedonians were able to make the connection and grasp the concept. The gifts of our earthly substance, properly given, is an act of ministry and servanthood just as surely as is the ministry of wiping a fevered brow, or admonishing a wayward teen, or teaching a hungry soul. It is deaconing.

### **V. The Essence of the Grace of Giving.**

If we could sum it up in a word, what does it mean to have the grace of giving?

*5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.*

The one who has given his own self to the Lord has no problem giving His substance to the Lord. He no longer sees His possessions as his own. When a man truly relinquishes ownership of his own soul to God the wallet, house, and car go with his soul. It does not occur to him that he owns something which God does not own.

A hospital visitor saw a nurse tending to the sores of a leprosy patient, and said, "I'd never do that for a million dollars!" The nurse answered, "Neither would I. But I do it for Jesus for nothing."

That makes all the difference in the world. When we continually to announce, year after year, with piousness, "*Well, after all, it is a bad testimony not to pay your bills*" and "*I can't afford to give much to the Lord's work*" it soon becomes obvious where your heart really is. Your heart is in the things of this world. You prefer to freeload off God for His blessings. You have *not really given yourself to god*. You are still self-ish.

*19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:*

*20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:*

*21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

I didn't say it, Jesus said it. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The essence of the Grace of Giving is found in the giving of ourselves to Christ. That is the real issue. If you do not give to the Lord's work you have not given yourself to Christ. Stop playing games. There is probably money in your wallet right now which belongs to the Lord. It is there because you have not given yourself to Christ. It is God's will that you give. It is GOD'S Intent. It



is God's desire. But it is more than a command, it is an evidence of the condition of the heart and soul.

## VI. The Exercise of the Grace of Giving.

We began our study emphasizing the sovereign side of this picture; God *bestows* this grace upon us. It is a favor and blessing of God to be a compelled giver. Lest, however, we blindly announce that we are still waiting for God to bestow this grace upon us, notice this verse:

*6 Inasmuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.*

None of the believers' spiritual gifts come naturally. They are all given by God. And, none of the spiritual gifts can be exercised without discipline, without practice or stirring up of the gifts.

For example a pastor has certain natural speaking abilities. If he does not discipline them and submit them to the proper study of the Word his ministry is likely to be fruitless. *Having* the gift is not enough. *Using* the gift is not enough. *Discipline* is absolutely required in the use of gifts. The teacher must wait in his teaching. The ruler must rule with diligence.

So it is with the believers' *graces*. None of the believers' *graces* come naturally. They are all given by God, but none of them can be exercised without discipline. Giving muscles become stronger when giving becomes a habit, a practice, a discipline. It is a work which must be *finished* in us.

That was Titus's job, to finish, to *further completely and to fulfill* this grace which had already begun in the lives of the Corinthians. That is also the duty your pastor, to finish this grace in you. That is your duty as teachers, to finish this grace in your students. That is your duty as a father, to finish this grace in the lives of your children.

Some of us need to go to *finishing school* very badly. We cannot understand why the numbers never crunch. We long for more joy and meaning in our lives. We see giving as a duty and tithing as a task. Giving it is not to be seen in that light, whether you call it a *tithe* based on the principle of the tenth, or an offering, based on the principle of proportionate giving; giving *is the giving of yourself*.

There is bumper sticker that seems to be popping up more often which goes this way: *Tithe if you love Jesus; any idiot can honk!*

If you are without the Savior you need to know that it is our purpose to confront the scriptures "head on." We happen to be teaching about giving, not because God needs the money, but because it is a part of a regular commitment to Bible exposition. We have come upon the subject as we have progressed in our study of Corinthians.

If you do not know Christ you need to know that God does not want your money or desire that you give it to him. In fact, you may do yourself great harm by giving your money to God because you may risk the illusion that you are in some way pleasing or influencing God by the act. He does not accept illegal contributions or sell His influence. In fact, there is nothing you can do to please God. The Bible says that all our *righteousnesses* are as *filthy rags* in God's eyes. There is nothing much

you can do to please God except to receive something from Him. You need to receive His *righteousness* which He wants to give you in place of your own. He does not want to *take* from you. He only wants to *give* you the free gift of eternal life. And you may have that free gift for the taking right now!

## Where There's A Will... (Grace of Giving - Part II)

Intro: In our last study we launched into the biblical discussion of the grace of giving as we paid close attention to the first 6 verses of 2 Corinthians 8. We used a simple form of outlining where we titled each verse with a significant Word. We *could* say that these 8 verses dealt with the *dynamics* of biblical giving.

What interests us as we turn our attention to the rest of the chapter is its *practicality*. We actually have a laboratory in front of us where the principles of giving are being applied for our benefit. We gain a surprising amount of insight for the problems which we face, right now, in modern times when we deal with the tough issue of giving.

As an example, I receive regular emails from a small group of missionaries and pastors who like to read book reviews of books which their colleagues have written. They also take time to scribble some of their thoughts and questions. One hot topic was the question of missionary support. What do pastors *really* think of missionary support levels? What do missionaries *really* think about pastoral finances? What facts should be taken under consideration when support levels are set? The missionaries in the group had one perspective, the pastors had another perspective, and the mission board representatives, *thankfully* had a third, moderating, perspective.

I will not rehearse the substance of the discussions, and I am certainly not being critical of it. The opposing views broadened all of the readers. But I will be critical of this one thing. I do not recall, in all of their letters, so much as one reference to what the scriptures have to say on the subject. We are now examining just one of several passages devoted to this subject. For a change, I would like to look at this passage in terms of the principles it provides in the area of giving and receiving support. Instead of going verse by verse we will try to move principle-by-principle. The second thing you will want to see is that we are talking to *both* giver and receiver. We are talking to both ends of the pipeline. When considering giving and receiving consider first,

### I. The Principle of Provocation.

(2 Cor 8:7 KJV) Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

This conclusion is the result of the first six verses. These Corinthians, who had been rightfully commended by Paul for the fact that they came behind no one in the exercise of their spiritual gifts, have been shown to be lacking in this grace also. We will set the technical considerations aside and continue to remind ourselves that *giving is a grace, just as spiritual gifts are graces*. Giving, however, is not just a *spiritual gift* for some individuals; it is a *grace for all*.

What we do learn is that this grace must be *provoked* in us, and we are to provoke our own selves. We are to see to it that we are givers, good givers, to the needs of others. We *can* fall behind very quickly and very easily in our giving habits. We *can* excuse ourselves very quickly for our non performance. *"After all, I am just a poor pastor. I should not have to give. I am the one who is*

*sacrificing. I am just a poor, under supported missionary. I do not have to give. When we adopt these attitudes we soon discover we have lost out on the blessing of God in our lives.*

But *how much* should I give? *How much* should I *receive* if I am on the receiving end? *How much* am I entitled to? That is answered with the second principle found in verses 8 and 9:

## II. The Principle of Poverty.

*(2 Cor 8:8-9 KJV) I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. {9} For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*

### A. Paul is appealing to the heart, not to the head.

The issue isn't so much the matter of obedience, as important as that is, the issue is *love*, and the *sincerity* or *evidence* of our love. We are all capable of lying to ourselves. We do it every day. We can kid ourselves into thinking the love of Christ pervades in our lives and in our walk. But the scriptures are quick to affirm that it is not what we feel in our hearts that matters. What matters are the results that come about in our lives. We cannot say we love people while we let them suffer.

There is a peculiar teaching which surfaces every few years in fundamental circles which tries, through ridiculously careless rules of interpretation, to suggest that we are only obligated to respond to needs which come *directly before our physical eyes*. According to this view, the line of responsibility for meeting the needs of others is limited to the things we see around us. Don't you believe it. That is nearsighted giving. Most of these Corinthians did not know the Jews in Jerusalem, but they had a farsighted love.

### B. Paul is presenting a principle, the principle of Poverty.

When we are looking for a gauge by which to set our giving and receiving standard, we have one, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*

Isn't that the whole basis of ministry? Isn't that the whole concept? Shouldn't it be that by our *poverty* someone else might be made *rich*? Christ *impoverished* Himself for us!

What actually happens when we sin in general and when we covet, in particular? One of the things which happens to us is we presume *entitlement*. We believe we are *entitled* to take. We are *entitled* to make an exception with another woman because we are having problems in *our* marriage. We are *entitled* to covet. The first step for the *giver* (and the first step for the *recipient* alike) is to set the record straight on the matter of entitlement. In spite of what others may suggest, we are not giving *or* receiving in order to enrich ourselves.

Paul followed this rule very carefully in his own life. If he truly felt like he did not need the money he refused it.

Where do we draw that line? What if you are the pastor of a super church? I was in a seminar once where they discussed the salary of a pastor of a super church who has a very godly pastor. The pastor had continually refused to take more than what his *real needs* were. But the elders loved him dearly and wanted to give him more. This is what they finally did. They told him that they were over paying him because they wanted to test him. They wanted him to be an example to the rest of the congregation as to how a godly man handles his abundance. So, as a lesson to the congregation, they began the practice of overpaying him, and he humbly accepted the challenge!

You may smile at that, but the truth is the opposite occurs more often: ‘*Lord, you keep him humble, we’ll keep him poor.*”

So, what *is* the principle? The principle is we *reason our way backwards toward poverty, not forwards toward plenty*. Both giver and receiver alike should be willing to leave this world the way they entered, naked and poor. Neither giver nor receiver is *entitled* to anything but poverty. That is our entitlement, our privilege in Christ.

### **III. The Principle of Performance.**

*(2 Cor 8:10-11 KJV) And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. {11} Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have.*

This little historical insertion is here for our benefit. These Corinthian believers, who had committed themselves to giving a year later, and had not yet been able to complete the process. They had made a commitment regarding which they had not followed through. It may be because they *could not* follow through. They may have had no way to get the goods to Jerusalem. It may be because they *got careless*. Their intentions where good, but when it came to writing out the check, there was too much month left at the end of the money. It may have been a practical problem.

Paul’s purpose was not to assign *or* relieve their guilt. His intent was to encourage them to complete what they had committed. He said, you had a *ready will*, now perform it. Follow through. Are there lessons in this for us? There are plenty:

#### **A. It is good and right and proper to make a faith promise.**

In most of my former pastorates we would have an annual Faith Promise time where we each, before the Lord, had our hearts and minds prepared, and then committed to what we were going to do for missions in the next year. Faith promise is good; it is not a program or a gimmick. It is good and biblical. The person who makes a faith promise before God is way ahead of the fearful and fainthearted who are afraid to trust God for the means to keep that promise. It is a wonderful thing to take a step of faith and watch God provide the need.

#### **B. It is good to perform your faith commitment.**

If you as a pastor accepted the salary, if you as a missionary agreed to a support level, if you as a giver agreed to a giving level, then abide by that commitment. Does that mean that the terms of our agreement never change? We know that is not true. But it means that there is a basic commitment to make it work until God makes it very clear to us that He is changing the rules or the players. Give God time to work out His plan for you. Keep your commitment to Christ. It is in the keeping of our commitment to Christ that our love is shown, not simply in the making of our commitment.

#### IV. The Principle of Parity.

*(2 Cor 8:12-15 KJV) For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. {13} For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: {14} But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: {15} As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.*

##### A. Understand the goal of Parity.

The goal is that there will be the kind of *equality* expressed so that none will suffer while others indulge.

**1.) Please do not equate this with socialism or communism.** This is not Christian communism. The economics of communism are fundamentally different that the economics purported by Paul. I started to provide a summary for this study and had to set it aside. We would go *far beyond the scope of this study* to dig seriously into these issues. In a word, however, we cannot impose from the outside what only God can do in our hearts from the inside. Neither socialism nor communism can long survive until the issue of personal selfishness is resolved.

**2.) But we do understand the concept of parity.** We do understand the goal. When all things are considered, one believer should not be starving while another is choking in opulence. That is the goal.

The missionary with two children has a right to ask whether the gifts appropriated to him are adjusted relative to the couple who has no children. It is a legitimate question. I would *rather* that he would inquiring about the welfare of the missionary who has four children, but nevertheless, the point should be well taken. Do you reward childbearing? Do you reward seniority? Do you reward productivity and responsibility? Do you fund a missionary who is financially secure the way you fund a poor missionary? Do you care for retired missionaries? We all *want* parity, but, how do we arrive at parity?

**B. Understand the Process of Reaching Parity** Notice the process which Paul is using right before our very eyes, as Paul himself struggles with the issue of parity.

**1.) Paul relies heavily on the hearts of givers to be stirred by the need.** Givers are some of the wisest people I know. When Christians give directly to missionaries (as a rule) they are the *first* to sense abuse, and the *first* to be prompted by special needs. In this pastor's opinion a church's mission fund is its safety net. It is a way to guarantee that we are obeying God. But it should

never be a church's intention that individual Christians think that their personal commitment to giving toward missions ends with the missions fund. It is only a beginning. Why? Mission funds don't stir hearts to give. Mission funds are often not accountable. Mission funds are impersonal. When you personally support a missionary the whole spiritual process of *encouragement, partnership, and service* works much better. You cannot *fellowship* with a fund. Admittedly, reading missionary prayer letters aloud for the congregation mitigates this problem somewhat, but the sense of our personal involvement in that missionary's ministry is still weak.

Part of the process for reaching parity is to let God do his part in the hearts of willing givers by not setting rigid support ceilings at every level. Let God prompt believers to give to needs, not to funds. That will *help* solve the parity problem. When we do this we are allowing the Holy Spirit to do His part in adjusting financial support loads.

**2.) Paul relies heavily on the example set by other churches.** In this case, Macedonia. How did we know the Corinthians were falling behind? We know because the Macedonians were outstripping them.

There is something to be said for industry standards. What are other churches in our size and strata giving? What are other missionaries receiving? What are other pastors receiving who pastor similar churches? Are we ahead or behind? It is perfectly fair and proper to seek to arrive at a *balance* by comparing our standards with the standards of others. But we should not stop there.

Parity will never be reached until we all have more freedom to talk about finances – giver and receiver alike. We should commend the generous, and even use them for examples, and gently warn the slow givers, again, using the generous as examples of the possibilities which they have.

I would like to add a personal note, based on years of observation. I have rarely seen the Lord's servant who is faithfully ministering in the task to which God has led him who lives in poverty. In the unusual cases where I have seen Christ's servants suffer I have yet to find an instance where one of three facts were not true. 1.) The missionary is not diligent in raising prayer partners for his task. 2.) The missionary refuses to see that God has not really placed him there. 3.) The missionary or pastor, himself, is a miserly person who is not a giver. I am sorry to say I have observed all three.

As long as we sweep all of this under the rug with some pious statement or truism, these problems will continue on in Christianity.

## **V. The Principle of Propriety**

In the following verses we see the practical issues of giving being worked out. How are we going to get this money to Jerusalem? How can be sure it is handled properly? Three people are named as a part of this process.

First, there was Titus (in verses 16 and 17) whose credentials in the eyes of the Corinthians were *impeccable*. But others were chosen as well, *even though Titus* was trusted. Paul cared enough about Titus not to allow Titus to be in a place where he could be unfairly criticized. He tells us in verses 20 and 21:

(2 Cor 8:20-21 KJV) *Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: {21} Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.*

We all have a duty to provide things honest in the sight of all men. None of us are above scrutiny.

Then, in verse 18 we have another brother. He is brother Famous in the Gospel. And then, we may have another brother listed in verse 22. He is brother Tested and proven diligent in all things. It is interesting that their names are not given to us. They are titled by their characters! We should each desire to be the man who is known for his ministry in the gospel, the man who was tested and proven diligent in all things. These are the kinds of men we want handling our finances.

We save coupons in our home. Recently I received a coupon with an offer for a car wash which I couldn't resist. I try to leave a little change in my car when I take it to the car wash because it is my way of proving the workers. I don't believe the sign out front which announces that the car wash is not responsible for my goods. I don't want my car washed by thieves; period. So, I left a few coins in the car and, I am sorry to say, they were stolen. They were tested and they failed. I have since found a car wash where the coins remain. I am sorry to say I know pastors who are not beneath grabbing a little extra loose change when they find it. Small indiscretions are often harbingers of great character flaws.

When we put men in positions of responsibility in church and missions finances, may they be men of *great care*, like Titus, and men who are great in the gospel, and diligent men who have been tested and proven.

In the inimitable words repeated by our "Bob the Builder" pre-schoolers, "Can we do it? Yes, we can!" We can apply these principles to our own lives:

1. The principle of *provocation*, let us provoke one another to give.
2. The principle of *poverty*, the only *entitlement* we find in this gospel is the *entitlement* to poverty. When giver and receiver want to share in Christ's poverty they will not scabble over minors.
3. The principle of *performance*. Do what you said you would do. It is good to commit. It is good to follow through.
4. The principle of *parity*. Let us not seek to abuse givers *or* recipients. Let us seek true equality.
5. The principle of *propriety*. Let everything be done decently in order with good standards and guidelines and good financial statements.

When we do these things we are guaranteeing our investments in eternity!

If you are without Christ because you are using religious charlatans and like Jimmy Swaggert and Jimmy Baker as your excuse I have only two reminders for you. First, most Christians and Christian organizations are not that way and your own integrity is at stake when you use the abuses of a few as a smokescreen to discount your own obligation to your God. Secondly, worry more about this: What if you wind up in eternity with charlatans? Won't that be a joke? If you chose to stay out of heaven because of the abuse of a few, so that you could enjoy all eternity with all the rest? That is not a wise investment at all. To gain the world but lose your soul is the greatest loss of all!



## Try It, You'll Like It!

Intro: We are in the third in a three part study on the Grace of Giving based on our ongoing study of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. We are devoting only one study to the entire 9<sup>th</sup> chapter and our purpose is to bring the discussion of giving to a conclusion.

What we find in chapter 9 is an earnest effort on the part of Paul to *motivate* these believers to exercise the grace of giving. It is a highly *persuasive* passage. The wise reader will understand that the persuasive techniques which Paul uses here are good and wholesome and helpful. We have seen Paul use these tools elsewhere in other contexts. A perfect example of this is found in Paul's letter to Philemon.

I enjoy the *positive outlook* of chapter 9. It is very bright and encouraging. He wants these believers to understand that this exercise of the *grace of giving* is beneficial for everyone. So, I titled the chapter "Try It, You'll Like It!" Let's see if we can follow the flow of 2 Corinthians 9 and be, ourselves, won over by Paul's convincing arguments about giving.

### I. The Matter of Clarification

We must understand a little more what we mean when we talk about biblical giving so that we do not give indiscriminately"

*(2 Cor 9:1 KJV) For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you:*

According to this verse, then, when we exercise the grace of giving, what should we be doing? The answer is we are to be *ministering to the saints*. That is the focus of giving. That is its intent. We give in order to o *minister* to the saints.

#### A. We are ministering, or *deaconing* when we give.

We are *servicing* when we give. Giving is another method or expression of our servanthood, the natural reflection of our position in the Messiah who is still filling out the task of the suffering servant, calling out the nations. Giving is servanthood.

#### B. The focus of our giving is toward the *saints*.

Is our giving to be restricted only to *alleviating poverty* such as the kind of poverty in Jerusalem which occasioned this offering? No, it is not. Giving may be rightfully directed not only to suffering saints, but to other ministering saints as well. New Testament giving is to be directed toward missionaries such as Paul, and spiritual leaders everywhere.

But there is an impression which needs to be made. *Ministering to saints* (be they the poor saints, the evangelists or teachers) should always be our *primary focus*. Budgets are helpful and often necessary tools, but there is something dehumanizing about giving toward a budget. We lose the personal awareness of what we are doing. Should we give toward programs? The answer, again, is yes. But remember the *people* being impacted in the programs are our real source of interest. Should we give toward *buildings*? We should give toward buildings if in the rental and purchase of buildings we are enabled to *better* minister to people. However, the *focus should never be on buildings*, as it often is.

I once heard Dr. Yeager, at the Institute of Church Imperatives in Fresno, CA, say that you can judge the spiritual health of your church by its budget. Its budget should reflect expenditures on people first, programs second, and buildings third. I agree strongly with Dr. Yeager.

The *grace of giving*, properly applied, *is the grace of ministering to the saints*. It is the grace of serving others with our gifts. We *are* ministering when we give. The *focus* is to be to the saints.

## II. The Matter of Commendation

Starting with the last phrase of verse 1 and adding verse 2 we read:

*...superfluous for me to write to you: 2 For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many.*

Well, Paul, we may rightfully ask, if it *is* superfluous for you to write about this, then why did you do it? The answer is two-fold. First, he wants us, you and me, to learn from their example. Secondly, he wants to *commend them*, and rightfully so, for the progress which they *have made* in this area.

This does not surprise us because we have already trekked so many miles with this Apostle. Paul *always* commends before he corrects. That is why his *corrections* were always so well heeded. It is a lesson every pastor needs to learn, every teacher needs to learn, and every parent needs to learn. We earn the right to be critical by being affirming and supportive. Don't fall into the trap of going to either extreme. Affirming without criticizing is as dangerous as criticizing without affirming.

We are commending these Corinthians for their *zeal* in this matter of giving. Whatever flaws these Corinthians had, with all of their warts, no one could fault them for lacking zeal. Whatever they did they did with zest and vitality. When they praised God they did it with zest! When they exercised their spiritual gifts they did so with great ardor and energy. They may not have been a studious bunch. They may not have been a disciplined bunch. Sometimes I don't think there was a choleric or phlegmatic or melancholy soul among the whole lot. They were pure butterfly-like sanguines who all amassed in one location. Nevertheless, they had zeal and it was the kind of zeal which provoked others to follow them in obedience in this area. For this we commend them and desperately need them among us.

The problem with sanguines is that they are great for *taking on projects* and *never finishing them*. They are children of the moment. They attend that famous "Church of What's Happening Now!" They must be encouraged to carry their intentions through. And that brings us to the third matter of our outline:

### III. The Matter of Expectation

*(2 Cor 9:3-4 KJV) Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: {4} Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting.*

It is not enough to *commend* folks for taking initial steps of obedience. The leader will always *expect* performance after a commitment is made. Paul is very much like the parent who says to his teenager, *I believe you and I trust you with all my heart, but you still have to be in by 11 PM!* The two statements seem, at the first, to be *contradictory*. But they are not. The first declaration is a statement of trust; *I do trust you*. The second is a declaration of intent to help that young person *keep* his position of high trust; *be in by eleven*.

Looking back on my own teenage years I can appreciate how my own parents used some of these same techniques on me. For example, my parents always managed to convince me (as an older teen) that the decision to attend church was my choice. At the same time, they managed to make it virtually impossible for me not to go to church. They *trusted* me to make the right choice and then they let me know what they *expected*. They were so good at this that I never once felt pressured into going to church and I never once entertained the idea of staying home, not even to do homework. It took me years, however, to realize the wisdom they had applied.

Paul is up to the very same thing here. He is walking the fine line between *trust* and *expectation*. Notice how he places his *trust* in them and then creates the circumstances which will guarantee that they merit his trust. Look at verse 5:

*(2 Cor 9:5 KJV) Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up before hand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.*

He does not manipulate. He just creates the circumstances which will allow obedience to be the natural response. *“And by the way, I’ll be sending some folks along to pick up the offering which I know you are already in the process of collecting!”* Wise leaders learn to walk this fine line. And, as we will see, Paul is going to mount another tightrope here and walk yet another fine line, the line between *duty and desire*. Let’s look at the next matter.

### IV. The Matter of Education.

It is not enough to commend folks when they obey God. It is not enough to expect folks to obey God. People also need to know *why* it is important to obey God. They need education.

One of my biggest criticisms of the Christian School movement is that it does not properly educate its parents about the purpose and philosophy of Christian education. We need to understand the underlying dynamics and purpose of Christian education or it will end up being public education, one step removed. Frankly, most Christian school teachers and administrators can’t even articulate a basic philosophy of Christian education. The requirement to educate both client and vendor, by the way, is foundational to *any* endeavor of man, sacred or secular!

We need to be educated givers. It is not enough for us as believers to know that we *should* give. We need to understand the *purpose* and *philosophy* of giving. We need to understand the dynamics. We have already explained the essential *nature* of giving; it is an extension of our servanthood. But we have not explained *how* the grace of giving works. We will rely on verse 6 to set that tone for us:

*(2 Cor 9:6 KJV) But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*

To understand giving properly we must understand the law of sowing and reaping. This is not necessarily an Old Testament truth, though it is surely taught there. We read in Proverbs 11:24 and 25:

*(Prov 11:24-25 KJV) There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. {25} The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*

Nor is this necessarily a New Testament truth, though it is taught elsewhere in the New Testament:

*(Gal 6:7-9 KJV) Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. {8} For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. {9} And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

The principle of sowing and reaping is a principle based directly upon the character and nature of God Himself. It is a principle which nature itself teaches us. It is a principle which applies to all of life. The Lord Jesus said:

*(Luke 6:38 KJV) Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

There is a *law*, a *principle* associated with giving. It is an *agricultural* principle. We sow in one season, we reap in another. We reap *what* we sow. We reap in *greater abundance* than what we sow. If we are miserly when we sow we will be impoverished when we reap. That is one reason why we *purpose* in our hearts to give, just as the farmer purposes in his heart to set seed aside and plant it rather than eat it. Verse 7 announces:

*(2 Cor 9:7 KJV) Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

God is a giver. It becomes us to behave like our Heavenly Father. We are godlike or godly when we give. When we give in the spirit which God gives we will reap. But, we must not stop here. That is just the *principle*. That is where the name-it-and-claim it people stop. Do you want to be rich? Then give more. Preferably, give *me* more and you will be rich. That is not what Paul is suggesting. That would run in contradiction to so much of what God has already taught us. *Why* do we want to reap bountifully? Do we want to reap bountifully, so that we can satisfy our own lusts? James said:

3 *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

We do not pray or give in order to be personally benefited in a way which will satisfy your fleshly desires. But why *do* we want the bounty? We *do* want to reap more than we sow? Paul gives us a few of the reasons in the remaining verses of the chapter.

#### **A. We want to reap so that we will be able to abound in every good work.**

8 *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:*

We give so that our service for Christ is not limited, so that we are not limited by lack of material resources to do the things which God has called upon us to do. We want to abound more so that we, may, in turn do more! We do it so that we may sow even more seed and be an even greater blessing.

#### **B. We want to reap so that our righteousness may remain.**

9 *(As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever.*

10 *Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)*

We do this *so that we may leave lasting fruit behind*. That the work of righteousness can go forward. The more we give, the more we further the cause of righteousness. Not all the bounty of our sowing is returned in cash dollars. We would never need or use that amount of money properly. The bounty is returned in the furtherance of the cause of Christ.

#### **C. We want to reap so that we might be the source of praise and blessing to God.**

11 *Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.*

12 *For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;*

Our giving results in *God* being glorified. It results in thanksgiving and praise being given in His name.

#### **D. We want to reap to set an example for others.**

13 *Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men;*

There are many believers who are quick to *receive* the gospel who are not so quick to *submit* to it. One evidence that we have *submitted* to the gospel is our love for the brethren. This is why we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:9:

9 *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.*

Willing, loving, generous giving is evidence that the gospel is alive and working in our lives. It causes others to glorify God. It is our giving, in turn which inspires others to give. This is multi-level marketing at its best!

**E. We want to reap so that we may benefit even from the new relationships our giving establishes with others.**

*14 And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.*

When we bless others through our giving they, in turn, become bonded to us. They become a blessing to us. We might say that these are the residuals of our investment. We reap new friends and new prayers on our behalf. Sometimes we even reap new help for ourselves in our time of need.

One concluding truth remains tucked away in verse 15:

*15 Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.*

We give to others in order to emulate God who gave us Christ, who in turn gave His all for us. If Christianity is based first on the gift of Christ and this free gift of salvation is the baseline from which all other issues are decided, then we should be givers! Doesn't it seem appropriate that Christians, above all other persons on the face of the earth, should be ready, willing, cheerful givers?

Paul said: 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Our God is a giver who freely gives all.

Jesus said, freely have ye received, freely give. When we give, we set the example for others. We receive in abundance from God and so are enabled to give even more. When we give we become the basis for others to praise and glorify God. When we give, we endear others to us in the name of Christ. When we give we emulate God, Who gave us His very best.

When was the last time you gave anything sacrificially for the cause of Christ? Is it because you need someone special to come along and challenge you? Do you need a dynamic and powerful speaker or the presentation of an urgent need, or is the Word of God sufficient to challenge you to regular and faithful giving? Are you faithfully giving to Christ and His Work? Are you ministering to others?

If you are without Christ you know that the most dangerous thing you can do is to give to God and His work. That is a dangerous thing to do because it tempts you to nurse a false hope that you have pleased God in some way. Before God will allow you to give to Him, you must first accept His free gift, this unspeakable gift, this gift of salvation.

## Masters of Illusion

*Intro:* I had two godly teachers in my public school experience. One taught third grade, the other taught in Junior High. Both were careful to maintain their testimonies and did everything in their power to exalt Christ while exercising the wisdom and restraint that is required of a public school teacher. Even at my young age, I saw these dear saints as spiritual allies for the cause of Christ, though, to this day I don't even know or care where they attended church.

I remember one day, however, meeting one of those teachers in a very *different* context. It was several years later at a Bible conference where I spent my summers, about thirty miles away from home. There she was, sitting in the row behind me. It was not until then that I saw an entirely different side of my teacher. Though our meeting was to be for only a few brief seconds, she went right for the throat. She leaned over the pew and asked me if she could see my Bible and then she immediately thumbed through it. Upon returning it said with all the authority of a school teacher – *"I wanted to see where you were in your walk with the Lord. I know that if your Bible is well marked you are growing in Christ."* I cannot remember how well marked my Bible was that day, what mumbling response I returned to her, or, whether I passed or failed her expectations. I only remember how *stunned* I was at her capability to get right to the heart of the issue. I also promised myself that she would *never* catch me with an unmarked Bible. I still worry when I get a new Bible that she will catch me with it before I can use it up a bit. This woman knew her time with me was short and she would not waste it by exchanging trivial social courtesies. She would leave a lasting impact.

*We are going to see another side of Paul*, a side which shocks us and stuns us. Our beloved, nurturing Apostle who is normally as gentle as a nurse with her children is going to go for the throat. These next verses, or should I say, chapters, are not for weaklings who associate Christianity chicken soup and Melba toast. The common courtesies we normally associate with Paul are all but set aside. He has a weighty matter on his mind and he is going to go for the throat.

This is *target* time. Those who read all of the notes in this study know that the whole book is a *defense*, a defense of the New Covenant, a defense of the gospel against the intrusion of secular philosophy in the Corinthian church, and yes, a defense of Paul's own apostleship. We have seen *defense* everywhere in this epistle. But, never have we seen the opponents targeted and singled out as directly as we see them here. The reason is that they have made some very direct and personal accusations which, if left unanswered, will rob Paul of his ability to minister to the Corinthians with authority.

### I. The Accusation

*(2 Cor 10:1 KJV) Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:*

This verse is pregnant with irony and satire. It is designed to get our attention and to get the attention of a select person in the church who was *leading* an attack upon the ministry of Paul. We see an example of the actual attack in verse 10 where Paul tells us *what* this man is saying:

*(2 Cor 10:10 KJV) For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.*

The words “*they say*” should be rendered *he says*.

So, looking at verse 1 we see Paul specifically addressing a personal attack which has been made upon himself. He does not react in anger but he certainly grabs the proverbial bull by the horns.

What is Paul intending when he says: “*Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*”? Let me tell you what I think he is doing. He is saying, “*Do you think Christians are so kind and gentle that they are weak little sponges that they do not rebuke the works of evil which surround them? I will show you meekness and gentleness. I will show you the same kind of meekness and gentleness which Christ showed.*”

There has always been a world of mythology and illusion which obscures the world of true religion. One of those myths is that the Lord Jesus was so kind and loving that He never took on an aggressive posture. Yet those who have read the gospels know that our Savior took on the Pharisees and Sadducees with a vigor which blows us out of our seats. Jesus Christ was no paper tiger.

There is a gentleness of character and a kindness of spirit which dominates our natures which is Christ-like. There is also a gentleness and kindness of spirit which is *not* Christ-like. It is not Christ-like when gentleness and kindness are exhibited as an excuse not to confront disobedience. “To sin by silence, when they should protest, makes cowards of men,” said Abraham Lincoln.

Paul continues with his satire:

*...who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:*

By your own words you see me as *ordinary*, as an *old shoe*, when I am among you. And you see me as being bold when I am absent, so I shall fulfill your predictions and be *bold*.

*2 But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.*

Can we put some words in Paul’s mouth? I think we can sense what Paul is saying. “Even if it is true that I have two personas, one in my letters and one in your presence, wouldn’t you rather have it that way? Wouldn’t you rather I was bold in my letters so that I do not have to be in your presence?”

Until the writing of this letter, Paul has been acting in every way like a gentleman. He has tried to avoid escalating the problem by dealing with it in a general sense in his letters so that the precious time spent when they could be together in person would not be used up in painful confrontation but rather, in fellowship. Instead of catching a clue they have chosen, instead, to accuse Paul of duplicity and inconsistency. “He talks big - but he doesn’t carry much of a stick. In reality, there is no substance to him.”



But here is the real accusation. This is what really hurt Paul. If it is true that Paul has two personas, two standards, then Paul is guilty of duplicity and deception. He is guilty of manipulation. He notes: "...wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh."

In a word, Paul is being accused of carrying on the Lord's work using worldly or fleshly techniques. His opponent has crossed the line in rallying the opposition. He has made the issue of Paul's ministry a character issue. If the character of the messenger is at stake the character of the message is at stake. Paul cannot speak with authority. He has no choice but to address the issue.

We have seen the general nature of the attack. Now, let's look at:

## II. The Answer

Look at the way Paul responds to the charges. When I studied debate in school I was taught that the first and most important thing a debater must do is to gain control of the situation by establishing the terms of the debate, the grounds upon which the issue is to be settled. This is exactly what Paul does. He is going to help us see that his detractors have *misunderstood* a number of very important things.

### A. They have misunderstood the nature of Christian ministry.

Ministry is *warfare*.

*3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:*

We all live in the flesh. We have bodies of flesh. But the issue goes far deeper. The Bible says that the natural man is not only made up of flesh, but he is, by nature, fleshly.

During my teenage years the father of one of my closest friends became involved in local politics. One day he simply walked away from it all. It was not because he did not have good ideas. It was not because he did not have the stomach to fight for a good cause. Rather, it was because the politics were so low and so degrading that he, as a Christian, could not with good conscience allow himself to be a part of it. They were fleshly. Of course, modern politics have long since cleaned itself up.

Paul says we don't behave that way. But, do not be confused, we *are* at war! We are at war against the powers of darkness. This is a life and death, heaven and hell struggle going on right under our very noses. We must allow none of this *ecumenical sentimentality*, none of this *choose your path to heaven* nonsense, and none of this *it will all come out OK in the end* stuff. This is a great contest. Paul said in Ephesians 6:

*12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

### B. They misunderstood the weapons of the warfare.

4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

The weapons of our warfare are not carnal or *fleshly*. Among other things, this is where the crusaders missed the boat. They thought the weapons of war were swords and spears. They are not. This is where Christian activists get off the boat. They think the weapons of our warfare are the weapons of political reform. This is where the social reformers miss the train. They think that education is the answer.

We are not necessarily opposed to social reform and political action in their proper contexts. They simply are not the weapons of our warfare. You simply cannot reform someone into heaven. They must come to know Christ personally. The issues which are keeping men and women from Christ are spiritual issues, not political issues and not necessarily social issues. It makes no sense for me to carry a bow and arrow into a modern tank conflict. And it makes no sense for me, to carry fleshly weapons and tactics into the spiritual battle.

The first thing which the combatant must understand then, is the arena. We truly are at war and the nature of this war is spiritual. Old weapons will not work. What kind of weapons *do* work? Paul says in Ephesians 6, because this is a spiritual battle, we must use spiritual weapons:

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

### **C. They misunderstood that spiritual warfare is first offensive and then it is defensive.**

We read verses 4 and 5 together to get the feel for this:

4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

If you will pardon the pun, this is *revolutionary*. We are not *in* the stronghold we are casting it down. A stronghold, by the way is a *fortification*. It is a castle or a bulwark, usually located on the highest ground. It is the hardest objective to take in battle. It is something that has been *fortified*.

Does this mean that the believer goes around destroying idol temples and the leaders of false religions groups? Is that how it's done? No, our weapons are *spiritual*.

What are we casting down? We are casting down *imaginings*. Don't get confused about that word. Imaginations are the rationalizations of those who reject the revelation of God's Word. They

are the reasonings of the scoffers and those who twist and pervert the doctrines of God's Word. Imaginations are the logical processes of unbelieving thought.

We are in a great battle, on every side and in every arena. And then, when the soldier goes to war from the pulpit, someone in the back pew always says, oh, he's so cold and unloving. Is the soldier who goes into battle to save his country unloving? You'd better hope he is.

Look at the beauty of this metaphor. We are to *cast down every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God...*

*...and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*

Paul is not talking about your personal thought life here, though every believer should seek daily to bring his personal thoughts in line with obedience to Christ. Paul is saying make no exceptions, make no allowances, and take no prisoners! If a thought (an intellectual position or logical device) leads men away from Christ it must be refuted and brought down. That is the objective of spiritual warfare. The warrior shows his teeth. Look at the directness of verse 6:

*6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.*

Do not, I repeat, do not take this verse out of the metaphor which Paul is using. The *readiness to revenge all disobedience* is not a suggestion on Paul's part that punishment should be carried out on those who disagree with him. He is simply filling out the metaphor of the citadel. We are casting down the strongholds. We are *ready* we are motivated for spiritual warfare. *We are up to the task.*

Believers who do not care about confronting all of those false ideas which lead men away from the knowledge of God are, according to this verse, disobedient. There are many disobedient Bible believing Christians around us today who have no *readiness* to take on false teaching when it rears its ugly head.

So, *boldness is required in spiritual warfare.* Paul was justified in being bold. Notice something else these opponents erred concerning:

#### **D. They misunderstood that spiritual warfare is not based on fleshly appearances.**

Don't stumble over the utter simplicity of this. They have *disqualified* Paul's message because his *appearance* among them was *base* or ordinary! Verse 7:

*7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.*

Is the man a Christian because he dresses like one? Is a man a pastor because he has a pastoral look or a pastoral tone? Is a man an apostle because he has a special robe or collar?

I have learned that the more *religious* one looks and behaves, the more *symbols* he uses externally to assert his spiritual authority, the more suspect I am of him. And I am the same way

about churches. Please forgive me if you are not. But the more we need robes and liturgy and colors and missals the more at risk we are of equating truth with outward appearances. I am even nervous around Christians who make a lot of noise about their spirituality, and I have always been wary of those fishy little fish symbols which show up on business cards. Why? I have seen too many folks hide behind outward appearances.

Christianity does change the outside of a man. It does change the way we dress and the way we behave and it may even prompt us to put a sticker on our bumper. But biblical Christianity is not predicated on appearance or the manipulation of outward images. It is spiritual warfare, a battle for spiritual truth, not spiritual feelings and spiritual fluff 'n stuff. It is a war against the thoughts and reasonings of men which would keep us from having a personal *knowledge of God*.

This whole battle is to bring men and women into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a personal knowledge of the living God.

So, Paul says, *you have misunderstood my appearance. You have judged me on the basis of your preconceived stereotypes.* We now ask, what about us? What are we to take away from all of this? What attitudes should change in us?

**1. Don't shrink back in holy horror when you see someone engaged in spiritual warfare.**

When you see someone take on the forces of darkness, the doctrines of unbelief, begin to understand that we're in the business of pulling down strongholds of disobedience and unbelief. Speak up when others witness! Throw your lot into the contest. Be willing to battle for souls! Be willing to fail and try again! Welcome the fray and savor it!

**2. If you will forgive the cliché', don't judge the book by its cover.** Most covers are much more appealing than the books. Don't be dazzled by all the religious bells and whistles that are out there. Don't rush to ride every new wave which comes along on the religious surf. Instead, confront yourself with truth, spiritual truths, not surface issues and issues of appearances.

**3. And, most of all, if you don't know Christ as Savior, keep in mind that this is what the whole discussion has been about.**

It has been about knowing God. It's time for your personal surrender to Jesus Christ. It's time you joined the winning army. You have been living with your head in the proverbial sand. You know that the forces of heaven and hell have been engaging since the beginning of time. You know that the day of consummation is fast coming. You would be wise to surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ and settle the issue of your salvation once for all. There's a place in the Lord's army for you!

## Masters of Illusion - II

*Intro:* We are in a great contest between light and darkness - between truth and lie. The enemy which we face is the ultimate *master of illusion*. Without *imaging*, he is nothing. Without *appearance*, he is useless. The Bible tells us that one of the big surprises which come to men when they enter hell is the discovery of what a small, weak, and utterly miserable person this destroyer of the souls of men really is. Isaiah, speaking of that day, says to Lucifer:

*(Isa 14:16 KJV) They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms;*

But for now, Satan is the master of illusion and the sons of Belial have learned well from their father. Christians, on the other hand, have learned not to look on the things which are seen, for they are temporal. Rather, we know that the things which are unseen are eternal.

The passage we are considering constitutes the arena where one of these contests between truth and illusion is being played out. The players are Paul, on the one hand, and on the other the impostors who would usurp Paul's influence and credibility.

The attack has been simple and profound. This Apostle Paul, who is base in appearance and contemptible in speech has been guilty of duplicity of writing bold and severe letters on the one hand, while being a pussycat when physically present at Corinth. They, of course, by implication, gloried in their appearance and in their rhetoric - obvious indicators that they represent the true oracles of God.

Paul was up to the challenge. In fact, Paul was so incensed by this shallow, low handed approach that he uses some of his strongest language in refuting this nonsense. As indicated in our last study, Paul used a *military metaphor* in order to make his point. We learned from verse 3 that:

- A. *They misunderstood the nature of Christian ministry. It is warfare.*
- B. *They misunderstood the weapons of the warfare. They are not carnal, but mighty to God.*
- C. *They misunderstood that spiritual warfare is first offensive and then it is defensive.*
- D. *They misunderstood that spiritual warfare is not based on fleshly appearances.*

In the eyes of our dress-for-success culture in which *imaging* is everything we are not ready believe in anything which is not falsely presented to us. We would not buy a hamburger if we saw a *real* photograph of it. We *want* our advertisers to lie to us, to misrepresent their products, and to flatter us all. Illusion is such a way of life for us and we are so caught up with worldly ways that we would not have it any other way. The same goes for our ministries and churches. We are no less vulnerable to illusion than were these Greeks.

We have another thought which we must glean from the remainder verse 7 and we don't want to miss the rest of what Paul is saying to these detractors:

*...If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.*

Whatever does Paul mean by this? I believe there is only one proper way to understand this verse, and the rest of the verses which follow. I believe we must continue in the line of the military metaphor or military analogy which Paul has established. The subject has not changed. Much of the wording which Paul continues to use supports the idea that Paul is continuing in this vein, and it best helps us sort out what Paul is saying. So we continue with this approach and notice the next thing Paul's opponents misunderstood.

#### **E. They misunderstood that a soldier receives his authority from his commander.**

*If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.*

The issue here is not simply salvation, it is authority. The whole discussion is about authority. The issue is just exactly who is *commissioned* to speak for Christ. Who is really commissioned? Who is credited? Soldiers do not confer this authority one-upon-another; they receive their commission from above. They are also *obligated* to recognize the commission which *another* has received whether they like it or not. In another passage Paul warns the critical believer:

*(Rom 14:4) Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? **to his own master** he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.*

Paul *explains* his own statement in verse 8:

*(2 Cor 10:8 KJV) For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed: (2 Cor 10:9-10 KJV) That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. {10} For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.*

Paul is *expanding* his previous statement. The soldier not only *receives* his authority from his commander,

#### **F. A Soldier is limited in the use of his authority.**

Luke 3:14 tells us of a day when the soldiers came to Jesus:

*(Luke 3:14 KJV) And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. [Underline mine.]*

The word for violence in that passage is *civil* violence. Jesus did not tell them to quit the military. They were not to be false accusers and they were to be content with their wages. By nature a soldier is conditioned to be violent. He is the one who is *ready to punish disobedience*. But the use of his authority to exercise violence is *limited* by his commander. He does not destroy the civilian. He destroys the enemy. He does not attack his fellow-soldier. He attacks the enemy.

There is no doubt in my mind at all about Paul's intent. He is saying to these impostors *real soldiers do not attack each other*, they attack the enemy. The issue is *not* personality! The issue is *not* persona! The issue is casting down strongholds! "*Why have you made me, a fellow soldier, your enemy?*" These men have shamed or dishonored their own uniform.

There is a lesson here for us. Do we confront fellow teachers who are twisting the Word of God to the harm of God's flock? We do because the sheep must know who the wolves are. *But there is a line we can cross* where we make it our specialty to demean persons and their characters rather than their message. When we cross *that line* we have dishonored our uniform. Remember how *personal* this attack has been against Paul:

Paul's bodily presence was said to be weak. Supposed historians tell us that it is likely that Paul was *'a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.'* Additionally, some theorize without a lot of support that Paul had an eye disease which caused a continual draining. The Greek culture, on the other hand, very much like our culture, had stopped worshipping the creator and worshipped the creature. It deified the human body. Greeks worshipped human form.

Paul's speech was said to be contemptible. To say that this means he was not powerful and eloquent is foolish. The pagans at Mars Hill were so taken by his oratory they confused him for Mercury. But, Paul's grammar, to some extent, and certainly his presentation, did not follow the normal rules of speechmaking in Paul's day. His message was not *adorned* with superfluous fluff and nonsense on which the peripatetics of that day thrived. It was not a work of art; it was an exercise in persuasion. It was highly *confrontational* and *direct* in an age when all public speaking was expected to be intensely relational and *subtle* - not at all unlike our times.

But the point is that the nature of the attack was *personal*. *Content* was not the issue. These intellectual pygmies couldn't stay within the ropes for even one round of this boxing match.

To summarize, a true soldier, is *limited* in the use of his authority. He does not attack the civilian he defends and he does not attack the fellow soldier. He pulls down strongholds. He attacks the lie and identifies its source for the protection of the people.

We need to love soldiers. We need to honor them when they are around. I love to hear those planes fly by, even when those hotshots push the envelope a bit. I sleep better knowing those boys are there. It is a good thing, an honorable thing, to be a soldier. And it is even more honorable to be a soldier of Christ. But soldiers must follow the rules.

Now, notice something else these men needed to remember about soldiers.

*(2 Cor 10:11 KJV) Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present.*

### **G. A soldier will follow through on his commitment.**

Paul *will* finish the job of correction which he began in his letters. Paul *will* follow through on his resolve. Paul's patience has been misinterpreted as weakness, just as the Bible tells us that God's patience has been misinterpreted as weakness by the last day scoffers who say *Where is the promise of His coming?*

To this day we are inspired with those prophetic words of MaCarthur who said *I will return*. We are mesmerized by the soldier's resolve. Unlike MaCarthur, Paul had not retreated temporarily, but like MaCarthur, He would return and finish the job. For the *disobedient* that constituted a threat. For the obedient, it constituted a promise.

What about *your* resolve as a good soldier of Jesus Christ? What about *your* courage to stand when the going gets rough? What about your determination to defend the faith and stand tall and true to the truths of this book? Good soldiers follow through with their commitment to the truths they have sworn to defend. These tin soldiers who were all sizzle and no steak would soon discover the power of this man with his allegedly contemptible speech and weak bodily presence.

We move to the next concept:

*(2 Cor 10:12 KJV) For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*

## **H . A soldier measures his performance by his commander's orders, not troop opinion.**

When a trooper is commanded to take a hill he does not return to his commander and say, "Well, Private so and so thought it would be good to eat lunch before we got down to business, so I thought if he could do it, I could do it too." He does his job regardless. His standards are set by his superior officer, not by his company or by himself.

I was in a church one time where a controversy arose over how the scriptures were handled in the Sunday school curriculum. Our leader said "If the Council of \_\_\_\_\_ approves this then who are we to challenge it?" I was in another church where a doctrinal issue arose and one of the men said, "I believe whatever so and so holds, after all, he is a graduate of \_\_\_\_\_ Theological Seminary." What is wrong when we begin to follow that kind of reasoning? We remove the scriptures as the ultimate standard. We begin comparing ourselves by ourselves.

- Are we doing this in our economic society? We have long since departed from the gold standard. Our economy floats from day to day on *public opinion*. We are comparing ourselves *by* ourselves. No one really knows what any currency is really worth. There is no standard of comparison.
- Have we done this in our secular society? How do we determine who sits in our professorial chairs? The answer: we give our doctorates and professorships to those who espouse the party line. No scholar dares to speak against the accepted norms of his discipline. What determines our morality? The group determines it. The community in which we live determines it. There is no absolute standard. We simply compare ourselves *by* ourselves.
- Have we done this in our evangelical society? I don't care what kind of disobedience you want to participate in, you can be sure you will find an evangelical leader of stature who will justify your position. We don't even buy a Bible translation in the bookstore anymore because it is a reliable and accurate translation; we buy it because Zondervan advertises it and all our friends have it, or because it is easy to read. We could care less whether it really is the message of our Commander. We don't care how many times it has been reworked by the opinions of men. We don't even *ask*. There is no standard. If it is sold it must be right. We simply compare ourselves *by* ourselves.



- Ecumenical activities come to town and the average Christian never questions them. If good is being done, the Holy Spirit must be in it. If certain national speakers or musicians are there we're going to go. We could care less whether or not we are obedient to God. After all, Christians everywhere are going to be there. Why are these things true? They are true because *there is no standard anymore*. When all the nations want a king we want a king. We want to be a part of what's happening. We worship a new god, the god of what's in now.

Dear friend, if you have made yourself of the number or compare yourself with those who commend themselves because they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves among themselves – *you are not wise*.

A soldier follows the orders of his commander regardless of what anyone else does. If he must stand alone he will stand alone. If he must die alone he will die alone. Will you stand alone if you are the last one to stand for the truth?

### **I. A soldier is also limited by his orders. He must never go beyond them.**

*13 But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you.*

*14 For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ:*

When we *measure* or meter our performance it must be exactly according to the *measure* or *rule* which God has distributed to us.

a. God *has* given us orders. God has not left us without a *rule* or a standard. Our Commander has not left us without instructions. The word *rule* is the word from which we get *canon*. The books contained in your Bible met rigid rules in to become a part of the canon. The Bible is our *canon* or our rule.

Because I have children in education there is periodic discussion concerning how the educational disciplines have modified their canon. High school literature canon, for example, has changed so dramatically that you would not recognize it any longer. The Christian canon does not change like the canons of men change. Nor does our Commander does not vacillate. He does not tell us that polygamy is OK one time and that it is not OK another time as certain other religions do. He does not tell us that blacks do not have souls one time and then tell us that they do have souls another time when it is politically advantageous to change. Truth does not change.

When Paul says *we will not boast of things without our measure*, he is saying that he takes no orders from any other source. Only from the *canon* which God has distributed through Christ.

b. We do not stretch ourselves *beyond* this measure. In our words, we do not go *beyond* the Word of God. We do not *add* to our Commanders orders. Paul is informing these impostors that he has done *just exactly what God has commanded Him to do*. He was not acting of his own volition.

c. We do not presume upon someone else's orders.

*15 Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly,*

A soldier does not choose which commands he will obey. He does not follow someone else's orders. He does what God commands Him to do.

These impostors had done exactly that. This was a direct challenge to their soldier hood. God had raised up the Corinthian church through the ministry of Paul, not them. Paul had not built on someone else's foundation. Now, false teachers have come along and tried to change the foundation. Paul *reads us* his orders in verse 16:

*16 To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.*

Paul had not yet *completed* his orders. That is why he was not still at Corinth. He did not leave because the work was done at Corinth. He did not leave because he was afraid to face the opposition. He left because his marching orders required him to do so.

What about *your* orders, Christian friend? Are they still in a sealed envelope? Are you relying on others to fill your orders? Or better yet, are you telling others how they should obey *their* orders, while you sit idly by? You and I are under the authority of this Commander as surely as Paul was. You know what God is leading you to do.

#### **J. A soldier will be held accountable by his commander for following orders.**

*17 But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

*18 For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*

In the final analysis it will not matter how good we made ourselves look. It will not matter how many degrees we have taken to ourselves. It will not matter how many lists contain our names. It will not matter how large our ministries were or how well known we were. It will not matter how we *measured ourselves*.

The Lord will commend and exhibit the approved, the *dokimos*, who have been tested and found approved. And, how differently God's army will appear in that day! Privates will be generals and generals will lose their stars and stripes because God's standards for ministry are sure, tried, true, and unchanging.

Will you stand the test? Will your ministry stand the test? Are you obeying your Commander? You will not answer to me and I will not answer to you on that great day. We will each man *give an answer for himself*.

And speaking of giving answers, what if you are here without Christ at all? What kind of answer will you give on that day when the secrets of all men's hearts are made known? What will I do with Jesus? The song writer retorts, Someday, your heart will be asking, What will He do with me?

## When It's Right to Interfere

Intro: We were in the shopping mall when a little toddler came running up in front of us with a big smile on her face. I did not need a college degree to know that somewhere, within a few feet of me, there was a mother who was watching her every move. As I glanced a little to the right, there she was, pushing the stroller, watching tenderly over her little girl and smiling at Anne and I as we walked by. I thought to myself, *I wonder how quickly that woman would have moved into action if someone had grabbed that little child and started running.* That woman would have started screaming and running toward her baby as quickly as she could. And, we would not blame her for it, for that is her sacred task. In fact, we would blame her for not doing it, even if her actions were less than polite.

In the chapter which presents itself to us today, the Apostle Paul has been charged with an important task, the task of protecting the sacred charge which has been given to him to protect these baby believers at Corinth. These were believers who had been won to Christ by Paul, himself. Instead of being praised for his efforts he is being criticized. Instead of being thanked, he is being demeaned. Nor does he stand alone, for all of those great defenders of the faith who have stood protecting the sheep in their generation have never been well appreciated, even by the sheep they were protecting.

### I. Paul's Plea

#### 2 Corinthians 11

*1. Would to God ye could bear with me a little in [my] folly: and indeed bear with me.*

This is Paul's prologue to the famous "*Fool's Address*" which we will soon encounter, a tongue in cheek satire. He is making a mockery out of the pseudo-wise who have seduced the Corinthians with their high sounding verbiage and authoritarian ways. Paul is practicing what he preaches, he is doing exactly what he charged Timothy to do in 1 Timothy 6:20:

*20 O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane [and] vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called:*

On the one hand, he is going to challenge the self-announced wise. On the other hand, he is going to challenge the gullibility of the Corinthians. To do this, he is going to parade his credentials before them in an act of folly. His plea, then, is tongue in cheek. You who are so all knowing and wise, will surely allow this fool one foolish moment to present his defense. We'll get a better feel for his mood as we move along. Bear with me, he says! Bear with my foolishness, if you will!

We have the same problem with the self-proclaimed wise of our day. It is difficult to get them to stop their diatribes long enough to even listen to what we have to say. It will stand forever as a testimony against the intellectually elite that, historically, they have shown the most bias and prejudice toward those who disagree with them, and they do so in the name of openness.

Now, what is Paul's *intent*? What is his *purpose*? Why is he going to such great ends? Why doesn't Paul just dump this sophomoric group of religious parade goers? Why doesn't he leave Corinth to their own just desserts? What motivates Paul to dig in his heels and duke this out with his opponents? The answer is in verses 2 and 3 where we see:

## II. Paul's Priority

*2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

There *is* a jealousy which is godly, or God like. Our God is a jealous God and He makes no bones about it. He wants no idols robbing Him of our affection. He is not one to share our affections. The Bible tells us that God's Spirit within us envies when we share our affections with this world. There is, then, a jealousy which is wrongly motivated and there is a jealousy which is godly. Godly jealousy is always motivated by true love and concern.

*But this jealousy tells us something about Paul.* It tells us that this contest is not simply an intellectual contest. It is not the challenge of a politician who is plugging for votes. It is, rather, the desperate *pursuit of a man who rescuing a seduced lover.* We have all witnessed too many contests over right and wrong where the struggle was never really for the souls of men. It was only to win the day, to make the point. So, we see that *love* is the real priority of Paul. These are matters of the heart.

We must be very careful even as we picture Paul in this word picture which he has created for us. Paul is not, I repeat, Paul is not the lover. Paul's jealous cause is not really his own cause. He is jealous for the cause of Jesus Christ.

*...for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ.*

In a typical wedding in *our* day an engagement occurs and, hopefully, the wedding follows. Engagements, while once considered legal and binding, are not viewed that way anymore. The law only requires that the woman return any gifts or tokens of the engagement. The breaking of an engagement is certainly not seen a dissolution of the marriage. There is, however, *only one ceremony.* In this ceremony the father gives the bride away to her future husband. While this is seen as mostly a token in most modern weddings, historically there really was a purpose for the father in giving away the bride. In giving away that bride he was stating two things: First, he was affirming her purity - that he, as a father, had protected her. Secondly, he was now surrendering his headship to the new groom who would be the head, the provider and protector of the bride.

In ancient times, however, there were *two* steps to the marriage. First there was the engagement during which the bride became, not a spouse, but *espoused.* She was considered to be *legally and socially* married though the marriage was not physically consummated. A period of one year usually lapsed before the marriage ceremony occurred and the marriage was consummated. In practice, the bride, by the way, may have hardly known her husband before the engagement. And, it was not uncommon for the groom to not even see his prospective. He very well may have been "*preparing a place*" for her, quite possibly, an addition to his own father's home or estate. Nor, did

either the groom or the bride know the exact day and hour when the final ceremony would occur. [I would like to underscore that this is a traditional description of what is generally accepted as wedding practices for that period. Various authors have various slants on the scenario.]

Our human and fleshly natures being what they are, this period between the initialization of the marriage and the completion of the marriage could be a risky time. Other competitors may come along. A friend of the groom (a best man, so to speak) was often given the task of protecting the purity and integrity of the bride. His duty was to present her as a chaste virgin on her wedding day.

[If, by the way, she was found to be impure, this was to this man's disgrace. On that occasion, and only on that occasion, in Moses' eyes, the groom could be released from his marriage vows. But this is the substance of another discussion.]

Why, then, is Paul willing to go to such extremes in order to rescue these Corinthians from the seduction of these false teachers? He is doing so in the absence of the Groom. *He does not want to have labored in vain.* He must give an answer for his watch care over Christ's bride until that great wedding day. When we carelessly give in to the false teachers and false apostles we will be *ashamed* on that wedding day when the secrets of all men are made known.

We have no business abandoning those whom we have won to Christ to false teachers. We have a duty to disciple and protect them, to build them up in the faith and to prepare them for their great wedding day. That is our great priority! Because we are charged with this duty we may need to take some liberties in order to accomplish our given task.

Paul is afraid, and rightfully so. He says:

*3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

Paul knows these Corinthians. He knows how easily they can be razzled and dazzled with the superficial and with high sounding words. Paul told the Romans:

*17. Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*

*18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

*19 For your obedience is come abroad unto all [men]. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.*

It's amazing what a little spiritual candlelight, a box of religious chocolates, and some sweet-talk can do to woo Christ's bride away from Him. She really is rather fickle. In fact, she is so fickle we wonder how He can even love her at all. But *His* love is agape love and it runs deep.

How then, is this naïve bride at risk? She is at risk of being seduced away from the *simplicity* that is in Christ. The simple message, the simple gospel, unadorned, makes an attractive target. Christ, the Son of God, died shed His blood, was buried and raised from the dead by the Father. All who place their trust in what Christ has done, instead of trusting in their own goodness, are a

part of His bride. So simple, so beautiful and so *childishly* simple it simply cannot be. There has to be more!

And so we begin plastering-over and painting-over the gospel, with our robes and our liturgies and our priesthoods and our special steps to salvation, and our extra revelations, and our messages from on high. We prioritize it, categorize it, intellectualize it, philosophize it. We mash it, we spread it, we condense it, and we expand it. We disguise it. We color it. We embellish it. It's just too simple. It looks so naked standing alone. It couldn't possibly be true. There simply must be more!!

There is a note of *sadness* in verse 4 where we find:

### III. Paul's Prediction

*4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or [if] ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with [him].*

Paul is saying, you are so gullible that you probably wouldn't even recognize the seducer. Notice the three potential sources of seduction to which Paul refers:

#### A. Another Jesus whom we have not preached?

I don't think so. Surely not in our day and age! Everybody knows who this Jesus is. Just take a look at your Saturday religion page in the paper! Just take a look at Hollywood! Tune your ear into the university chair! Listen to the cultist. Why there are so many versions of Jesus out there, Jesus' who have not been proclaimed by Paul and the Word of God, it is a wonder that anyone understands who He truly is. Do you want to know who Jesus is? Get it from the source. Find out from Him yourself Find Him in the Word of God...

#### B. Another Spirit which ye have not received?

Are there any false spirits dominating the land today? Are there any false spirits seducing the bride of Christ today? The question isn't where are they? The question is, where can you see the real Holy Spirit demonstrated anymore? Where can you find Him where His truth is *not* being abused and perverted? Where is He *not* being made into some three-ring circus? Are we so naive as to think that most of what is being done in the name of the Holy Spirit today is really done by Him? And if it is not being done by Him, then *seducers* are present.

I wonder if we have the courage to really square off with and face up to the terrible wave of seduction which is going on among God's people in the name of the Holy Spirit today.

I was reading an in Foundation Magazine about the nationally known Pennsacola Outpouring which had been going on for some time. It is the U.S. expression of the Toronto laughing revival only in a different vein. Instead of laughing and barking like dogs, this focus is on the river of God which flows through the congregation, throwing people around like they are paper dolls. May I remind you that this is a national phenomena and men such as Pat Robertson, Korea's David Yongi Cho, and scores of others have been hailing this as the great American revival.

I have included a paragraph or so from an article about John Kilpatrick, pastor of the Brownsville Assembly of God where all this nonsense began:

“Kilpatrick is not one to keep quiet about the ‘manifestations of the Spirit’ that have occurred at Brownsville. Such manifestations include uncontrolled shaking and trembling by sobbing members of the audience, individuals collapsing and remaining unconscious for hours at a time, blue haziness in the church building, apparitions of angels dancing in circles at the top of the auditorium, strong invisible currents pulling the entire congregation toward the front of the auditorium and bodies falling down in every direction. One time, Kilpatrick said God actually picked him up and threw him sideways through the air ‘at least ten or twelve feet’ across the platform, knocking his shoes off his feet. This episode was even captured on video.”

Speaking of the colossal pandemonium which was going on Kilpatrick said at one point, “ I think it’s time that we have grand pandemonium in the Baptist, in the Lutheran, the Episcopal, the Assembly of God [churches]. God send pandemonium!”

There is a touch of irony in his choice of words for history tells us that the word *pandemonium* was coined by Milton in Paradise Lost. Interestingly, Pandemonium was the name of the capital of Hell, the “high capital of Satan and his peers.” The literal interpretation of the word is “place of all demons.” In our dictionary it is simply defined as a place of wild disorder, noise, or confusion. Fellow Christian, there is not one word of justification in the entire Word of God, not one speck of evidence, which identifies this kind of behavior with the movement of the Holy Spirit and the glory of God.

Kilpatrick noted “*I’ve seen all denominations jump in this river and swim and play like children.*” And guess what some of the conclusions are which Kilpatrick has made as a result of this river of God:

He began noticing that a large group of sexually active, drug addicted, wild, scantily clad teenagers would fall to the floor under the “*power of the Holy Ghost.*” He said learned that he became aware that individuals do not need to become saved in be a part of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Salvation was not even necessary to participate in this revival! Dear friend, if you truly love sexually active, drug addicted, scantily clad teens, your whole focus will be on freeing them from the bondage of sin through faith in Christ.

He went on to say, and I quote “This move is not about preaching...We’ve heard so much of the Word of God that we’ve grown fat, but there’s been no power and no anointing and no miracles. I just want to tell you that’s why tonight I don’t feel bad about not coming up here and preaching a great sermon.” Dear friend, that poor congregation has not grown fat on the Word of God, they have probably never had the Word of God given to them on any kind of consistent basis. Paul told Timothy:

*16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*

The Word of God is not fattening. Junk food is fattening. The doctrines of the Word of God are what build up immunity in the soul from the false teachings of men.

Have you heard enough? Are you getting the point? The bride is being seduced. I leave this discussion with one final quote that really gets to the root of the issue. We now move to Haiti and quote from a current Christianity Today issue entitled "Voodoo Hold Seems Unshakable." Again, I quote from Foundation:

"This article cites Leslie Demangles, author of *'Faces of the Gods: Voodoo and Roman Catholicism in Vodoo Haiti,'* as implying that "Haitian Protestants have difficulty helping some new Christians see the difference between possession by the Holy Spirit and possession by a voodoo spirit. He said, *"Some see the Pentecostal baptism of the Spirit [as] very similar to possession in voodoo."* It is obvious that the same spirit is manifests itself to followers of voodoo and pagan religions.

It is time to call demonism demonism. It is time to call false prophets and false apostles what they are. We can no longer hint at it. The bride, the espoused bride of Christ is being seduced.

### **C. Another gospel which ye have not accepted?**

Another gospel? Surely, not in our time! Surely we are not so narrow as to think we have the only gospel? Surely a bloodless gospel is still the gospel! Surely the gospel which requires us to add our own works to is still the gospel! The gullible, seducible bride of Christ looks around with wonder in her eyes, marveling how we all work together, sing together, and evangelize together - all of us with all of our gospels.

I labor on these matters - because the scriptures do. I labor on these matters because the Bible commands me to. Paul admonished Timothy:

*(2 Tim. 2:13,-15) 13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. 14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

I labor on these matters because I fear for the body of Christ. Mull over these words one more time.

*2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or [if] ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with [him].*

When Paul spoke those words to the Corinthians he knew that some of them were discerning and some of them would never fall into these traps of following other Jesus' and other spirit's and other gospel. But Paul knew that some of them, especially the young ones in the faith, *could* be seduced. And so, he prevailed on the mature so that the immature could be safely protected.

Should there be jealousy? Yes, but it should be a godly jealousy. Should there be anger? It should be the kind of anger which is expressed when a mother is robbed of her child. My prayer is that a new generation will arise who will become offended and intolerant of the false gospels all



around them. By God's grace, may we have men who will make the pure message of the gospel ring loudly and clearly once again.

2 Cor. 11:5-11

[  
The outline in this chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter.]

## Out of Step

Intro: The Apostle Paul reminds us in chapter 2 of 2 Corinthians that Satan *can* get an advantage over us if we are ignorant of his devices. When I think of his devices, there are three techniques which come immediately to mind, though, I am sure we could quickly add another dozen or two. The three which I have in mind are these:

- 1. Satan is the great *accuser*.** That is, of course, his name. This Diablo is the great accuser of our souls who would, if he could, stand before God accusing the saints, day and night.
- 2. Satan is the great *counterfeiter*.** We will see the ultimate presentation of his counterfeiting skills at the advent of the anti (or, *counter*) Christ. But he is more than simply a counterfeiter; Satan always creates the mirror image opposite of what is real. We will discuss this shortly.
- 3. Satan is the great *deceiver*.** His method is deceptively simple. He does not usually provide us with one choice. He provides us with many choices, *many* counterfeits, laid alongside the real so that the real is difficult to distinguish.

As I list the following churches, see if you can tell me which groups preach the gospel and which groups do not.

Baptists, United Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopal, Church of God, Roman Catholic, Church of Christ, Lutheran, Russian and Greek Orthodox, charismatic and Assemblies of God, United and Oneness Pentecostals, Apostolic, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Seventh Day Baptist, Reformed, Reformed Baptist.

Do you want to know the truth? A great many Baptists preach the true gospel, some United Methodists (very few, by the way) preach the gospel. Old line Presbyterians preach it, modernist Presbyterians do not. The Episcopalians do not. The Church of God does overall, but keep in mind there are some weird works based sects among them. The Catholic Church does not. The Church of Christ does not. Some Lutherans do, many do not. The Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches do not. The charismatic and Assemblies of God generally do in the U.S., in South America it is more likely that they do not. The United and Oneness Pentecostals do not. The old line Pentecostals do. The Apostolic churches do not. The cults such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists, do not. Seventh Day Baptists generally do. While the old Reformed churches do preach the gospel, many modern Reformed churches (such as Schuler's' Glass Cathedral) are apostate. The Reformed Baptist Churches do preach the gospel.

Are you getting my point? We haven't even touched *other* false religious systems which reject the Bible en Toto. This great enemy of our souls thrives on presenting a multiplicity of counterfeits,

counterfeit religions; counterfeit Christians, counterfeit Bibles, counterfeits, counterfeits, counterfeits.

If you read the previous chapter you know that 2 Corinthians 11 contains some of Paul's strongest statements you will find anywhere in God's Word concerning counterfeit apostles who were presenting themselves and their messages in contrast to Paul and his message. Paul is grabbing the proverbial bull by the horns. We have seen:

**Paul's Plea** in verse 1 — bear with my while I play the role of the fool. He is posturing himself against those who were making him out to be a fool.

**Paul's Priority** in verse 2 – His duty was to present the Corinthians as a chaste bride to Christ - on that great wedding day. It is the same duty every pastor assumes today.

**Paul's Prediction** in verse 4. These Corinthians were so gullible that if someone came along preaching another Jesus, another Spirit or another gospel— they “...*might well bear with him.*” In other words - if they, in any way, shape, or form, bore the name Christian - they were to be accepted and welcomed. We continue on now with:

#### IV. Paul's Plan.

First, Paul is going to Exonerate his own character. Then, he is going to Eliminate his opponent's occasion for criticism.

##### A. Paul Exonerates Himself. Vs. 5-12

A few years ago I was sitting with friends around a table at a board meeting. I said to the man next to me “If I were a betting man I would say that your anniversary is on such and such a day.” He said “Why, yes it is! How did you know that?” I said it was easy. “Your briefcase is sitting open on the table. All I had to do was read your combination numbers while your case is open. I know that many men use their anniversaries as their briefcase combination. The year represented equated to a likely period during which you would have been wed.” That is how we are treating this passage today. We do not have all the facts, but judging by the kind of responses which Paul is making, we can assume the kind of criticism which Paul has been receiving. The first thing Paul insists on is found in verses 5 and 6:

1. His behavior was evident among them.

*(2 Cor 11:5 KJV) For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.*

When Paul says “*For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles,*” it is assumed Paul was not thinking about the apostles in Jerusalem! Rather, he was talking, very snidely, about these who saw *themselves* as the *ultimate quintessential* or “*superlative*” (as the original calls them) apostles. These false apostles are intimidating the Corinthians to change in their old, worn out apostle for a new up-to-date model!

Godly servants of Christ have no interest in comparing themselves with each other. We have already been over that in chapter 10. That is not Paul's intent here. Effectively, Paul is saying, "OK, *You have seen their apostolic behavior, now consider mine.*" Look at verse 6:

*{6} But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.*

It interests us that Paul admits to being rude in speech or uncultured. Paul was neither rude nor crude in his speech. He was simply *uncultured* in terms of the *apostolic impostors* who had written their own superfluous rules for sermonic and didactic delivery. There *is* a sense in which the proper proclamation of the Word of God will offend every culture known to man. Its message is straightforward and direct leaving no room for social games. Let that serve as a lesson for us, for try as we will to present our gospel in socially acceptable terms, in the final analysis sin is sin, wrath is wrath, hell is hell. These are very rude words indeed.

While we are not so interested in Paul's rude speech we *are* interested in his *knowledge* and his *openness*. Knowledge and wisdom do not usually come packaged in glitzy boxes. I met a man who showed me a picture of his family. Along with his wife, two dogs, and one 17 lb cat he had five children. He noted that they all wore glasses except the dogs. I commented "*Your whole family looks very studious, very scholarly.*" He smiled. Indeed they were. All seven family computers were networked to one server which had a seven disc CD changer on it which kept four encyclopedias accessible at all times. The children also had immediate access to Britannica on line. They were already accomplished internet researchers. They were scholarly, but trust me, they were not *glitzy*.

Paul says that his ministry has been thoroughly made manifest among them in all things. His life was an open book, a model. Speech is important. What we say is very important. But, our lives must correspond with what we teach or it is all in vain. I suspect Paul's protractors could not make such a statement that their lives were openly manifest before all. For, the more experience I have gained in life, the more I have come to understand that those who claim great superiority in one area of life usually leave much to be covered up in other hidden areas.

So, Paul did not have to *act* the part of being one with *knowledge*. He did not have to parade it. It was evident in his preaching and teaching. His own life was his authority. We find another defense in verse 7...

*7 Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?*

2. His abasement was for their exaltation.

A man of God effectively lives on a shoestring, wearing outdated clothes, eating pork and beans cooked on a hot plate so that a church can be planted and folks can hear the gospel. He does not come into town with a first class air plane ticket. He takes the Greyhound bus. What does he get in return? He gets the privilege of hearing someone say "*Oh, he could never handle any money, he's just a poor preacher!!*" Or, here is my favorite, "*He probably became a preacher because he couldn't do anything else!*" A great many pastors can identify with these comments. Verses 8 and 9 follow a similar vein where we learn:

### 3. Paul's generosity was for their enrichment.

*8 I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service.*

*9 And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.*

Some things about human nature never change. We tend to despise and cheapen services and gifts which are provided freely for us. If we do not have to pay for it, it must be cheap.

Now, I am only reading the numbers off the briefcase lock, but let me tell you what I imagine to be true. I think these Johnny-come-lately false teachers have been expecting a very high honorarium when they came to town. My guess is that they not only dressed for success, they lived in a very posh lifestyle. Money talks. The lack of money puts poor people in prison. The presence of money keeps the rich and famous out of prison.

Others suffered so that these Corinthians could be freely blessed. In return, they had begun to think they had a cheap gospel presented to them by a lower class missionary. In verse 10 Paul makes it clear:

### 4. Paul had enlisted others in the cause of Corinth as well.

*10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.*

Achaia was a broader term which included the regions around Corinth. The Corinthians were *debtors*, debtors to the Macedonians. They were debtors to other sacrificing believers and debtors to Paul. Perhaps, Paul was saying *"Before you write off this ministry as being cheap, consider how many have sacrificed for you. Consider your obligations!* Here they were, on the one hand, collecting the free services and ministry of Paul and his supporters, and on the other hand, despising his ministry because it was cheap! They were just like teenagers living off their parents, but embarrassed to be seen walking in the mall with them!

And then, there is verse 11...

*11 Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth.*

### 5. His purpose was to show his love.

The love of money prompts men to sacrifice themselves. The love of men prompts men to sacrifice for others. It's that simple. The higher the price a man places on his ministry the less likely he truly cares about those to whom he ministers.

So, let's summarize what we have learned so far. Paul has found it necessary to exonerate himself. He has explained that his behavior was evident among them. His self abasement was for their exaltation. His generosity was for their enrichment. He was proud of the fact that he could do this for them and be a blessing to them. He did this for the Corinthians, not for earthly gain, but because he loved them dearly.

## B. Paul Eliminates Their Occasion for Criticism

*12 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.*

When we look at human nature we see its ability to cheapen what is free. When we see how, not just in Paul's time, but in every age since, we have abased and diminished those who have abased themselves for us. When we think on these things, we are tempted to nurse a terrible possibility. We may be tempted to say, well, if folks despise things which are free and cheap, maybe we *would* do better to add a price to what we are doing!

So, maybe, we should learn a lesson from the world. Maybe we should charge for our seminars and classes. Maybe we should set high prices for our sermon tapes and videos. Maybe by placing a high price on the gospel men and women *will* place a high value on it. What do you think? Paul says, no. Even now, Paul will not accept remuneration from these Corinthians. He says we must not do this. Why? Because when we do this we give occasion to those very ones who glory in the flesh.

We must not give false teachers occasion to demean our message or to cheapen it in any way with a hint or suggestion that we are in it for the money. There is nothing they would love more than to seek to create a scandal about us. We must not stoop to their methods.

The *secular world* copyrights its music and books and so we do too as though the truth we are ministering belongs to us and not to God! *The secular world* charges top dollar for a CD and so Christians do too. *The secular world* charges top dollar for speaking engagements and so, popular Christian speakers do so too. *The secular world* charges top dollar for education and so we do too. The question never is: *Can God's people afford it?* The only question the Christian producer asks is: What will the market bear? How much can we sell our videos for? What can we get for that set of tapes if we package them up with a fancy cover with a fancy title? How much can we get away with charging?

The world sits back and smirks. We are behaving just as they behave, only they know what *we* refuse to face. We have made our Father's house a house of merchandise. Jesus said, "*freely have ye received, freely give.*" We say, Good Republican Christians have a right to earn all the money they can! That's what Christian capitalism is about!"

We do not say that a workman is not worthy of his hire, but we have the right to ask, *When* have the Bill G's of this life earned enough from their inspired, Spirit led ministries? *When* has Z\_\_\_\_\_ publishing profited enough from God's people? *When* has the salary of a pastor become excessive.

Thankfully, there are still tract ministries, Bible ministries, tape ministries, television and publishing ministries which freely give, trusting God to meet their needs. They do this quietly, in direct contrast to the hirelings. Those should be the ministries we support and endorse.

On the other side of the coin...Let's be careful not to despise all the good things that God gives us freely, just because they are free. Let us be grateful for that free salvation which is offered at Calvary without cost. Let us always proclaim it without charge, and, by God's grace, never accept a dime from unbelievers for doing it!

## A Reluctant Resume

Intro: Resumes have always made me nervous. I see them as one more way in which God's people mimic the world in their self-aggrandizing practices. While I understand that it is both biblical and wise to gather career information from a prospective employee I have always felt uneasy about offering a resume. Recently, I was reading a complimentary copy of the Sword of the Lord which came to my house and I was pleased to notice that a number of Christian churches and schools which were advertising positions were not asking for resumes. They were asking for *testimonials*, instead. And I thought to myself, at least it's a step. At least, when we supply a testimonial instead of a resume, we are giving God the glory for what He has done in our lives.

Paul is on the horns of a similar dilemma as we get into the heart of his famous "Fool's Address" beginning with verse 16 of chapter 11. He is going to be forced to behave like a worldling in order to make a point. Let's move along quickly.

### I. Paul's Reasons Restated

Paul is going to remind us again about what he said in verse 1. He wants these Corinthians to bear with him so that he can make his point:

*16 I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little.*

*17 That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.*

Perhaps, in our words Paul is saying, first, "I am not a fool, but if I must behave as one to gain your ear I will..." Secondly, "Acting as a fool, then, I am going to assume the behavior of a fool and I am going to brag. Fools are allowed to brag. Wise men do not."

And, then, as though to be very sure that no one misunderstands his intention, Paul makes the point in verse 17 that he is not speaking *after the Lord*, but he is speaking *fool - ish - ly*. He is taking on the posture of the fool in order to make his point.

We *know* it is not right to compare ourselves with others. We *know* it is not right to glory after the flesh. So, why then does Paul do it? Why does Paul say what he says in verse 18?

*18 Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also?*

Paul is doing so for the purpose of drawing a contrast. He is striking a pose in order to get a point across. He is doing this to gain his listeners' ears. He says in verse 19:

*19 For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.*

His comment is, of course, dripping with sarcasm. You can be sure he has their attention. Effectively, he is saying, you won't listen to me as a wise man. You have been wined and dined and wowed and dazzled by this new breed of false apostles coming through, so I will not speak to

you as a wise man. I will approach you as though I were a fool. After all, you will *condescend* to fools.

There is a certain irony in this, and we are still aware of this peculiar train in human nature to this day. We listen to fools and we ignore the truly wise. Our news media listens to fools and makes media events out of the events of fools, all the while ignoring the wise. Perhaps 2 per cent of our population is homosexual, but you would think 90% were. Perhaps 2% of women are truly feminist, but you would think 90% were. We even have a special *fools* day April 1<sup>st</sup>. A very small percentage of our society has managed to paint the picture that anyone who is for the protection and defense of an unborn child is a religious bigot. I say they are the bigots.

And, then, there is another trait of human nature which Paul points out in verse 20:

*20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.*

There is a strange, sadistic side, to our natures. We somehow *like* to be abused. We feel we need it. We are not happy if our religion does not put us in bondage. The root of all false religious systems is bondage. And they put men in bondage while promising them liberty from oppression!

Speaking of apostates and false teachers who speak with great swelling and alluring words, Peter says, concerning these wells without water:

*2 Peter 2: 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.*

Like the abused woman who returns to her abusive partner for more because, somehow, she feels she deserves this abuse, so men rush to false teachers instead of finding the freedom which is in Christ. You understand, I am sure, that we could devote the rest of the study to this one thought, a simple exposition of the terrible bondage which ultimately permeates all religions without Christ. Be it in the Kentucky hills where someone must repeat a chant three times and walk up the stairs backwards, in the Philippines where men crucify themselves each Easter in the name of Christ, in African tribes where women are mutilated in the name of religion, or in eastern countries where women are literally kept captives in their homes without outside contact of any kind. We have not even touched the tip of the iceberg. It is in our natures. We prefer slavery and bondage. But let's return to the thread in our passage.

To catch our attention and gain the ear of the Corinthians who have been seduced by the *pseudo wise*, Paul assumes the posture of the fool. In that role, he is going to play the braggart:

We have seen Paul's Intentions Restated. He is going to play the role of the fool. Now, let's see:

## **II. Paul's Resume Rewritten.**

How *would* Paul write his *spiritual resume* if he were bragging like a fool? These Corinthian believers needed to see how *he* would look if he behaved in the same manner the false apostles were behaving. He wants them to see the contrast.



So, Paul begins to list some of the things he *could* brag about - if he chose to do so. We actually have a grouping of about four categories which will take us into chapter 12 before we finish. They are:

1. His impeccable credentials - verse 22
2. His apostolic trials - verse 23- 33
3. His visionary experience - verses 12:1-10
4. His mighty apostolic works - in 12:12

### **A. His impeccable credentials were virtually impossible to match.**

*22 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.*

You and I see these three words as being essentially synonymous: Hebrews, Israelites, and seed of Abraham. Paul was truly a Jew in every sense of the word. In one place, Paul called himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews, probably an indication that he was one of the Aramaic, Palestinian Jews, not merely a Greek speaking Hellenistic Jew. Possibly, by also calling himself an Israelite, Paul is emphasizing that he was also a true Jew in all of the religious and social aspects of being a Jew. By calling himself a descendent of Abraham he may have been making a theological claim to all of his rights and privileges as a Jew. While we can't be certain of every detail of these claims we know no one had played the part of a true Jew more than Paul had. He was a Jew in every way right down to the color of his socks. From other passages of scripture we know that his Jewish pedigree was *impeccable*.

But, let me ask why should that matter? Is that something to brag about? Is your racial origin something which gives you special favor with God? Should a man take his identity from his bloodline and breeding? It seems to me that the more the families of this earth make of their bloodlines and breeding the more imbecile-like they become. That is something a fool would brag about.

### **B. His Apostolic Track Record was virtually impossible to match.**

Scan over verses 23- 33. In verses 23-25 we see his labors, stripes, beatings, and imprisonment's.

*23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.*

*24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.*

*25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;*

The first thing a new believer learns is that it is a wonderful thing, a joyful thing, to suffer for Christ. It is the greatest privilege God can bestow on a man or woman. But we must ask ourselves an important question here:

Is this really what true apostleship or true *servanthood* is about? Are we here to match scars? Are we here to see who can suffer the most? Fools compare scars. Fools compare each other based on who suffered or who gave up the most.

The same applies to the next verses where we see frequent journeys, toil, and terrible hardships:

26 *In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*

27 *In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

Is there anyone who can match this track record? Is there anyone who can approximate it in this country or anywhere else in the world? If we were establishing our spiritual credentials on the basis of how much we have suffered, would not Paul stand at the top of the list? But our response remains the same in this as well, only a fool would do so.

These are the reasonings of fools, the reasonings of this world. The more we can create the conditions of suffering for ourselves, the more we can suffer for God and the more spiritual we *really must be*. The closer to God we really must be. Do not misunderstand this. It is a wonderful thing when we can suffer for Christ; it is the ultimate privilege. But that is not the question we are asking. This is the question we are asking: Is *this* the way we establish our credibility? Is this where we get our kudos? Where we get our identity? I have repeated the words of Murray on occasion:

“Pride can clothe itself in the garments of almost any virtue. It can be at home equally as well in our prayer and penitence as in show business or in the throne rooms of the world.”

Pride can even be at home on the martyr's stake! Do you know that in the days of the Spanish Inquisition many professing Christians actually *sought out martyrdom!* They intentionally instigated the responses which would bring it about because they wanted so badly to become martyrs! They saw martyrdom as a guarantee of eternal life.

Paul also makes note of another kind of price that he has paid, a very personal and subjective price.

28 *Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*

29 *Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?*

The care for the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? Perhaps *that* is the true test of apostleship, the pouring out of our lives for others. Surely that is it. If we can brag about something, if we can get our *identity* from anywhere, it must be here. Surely there is No higher achievement than this. Once again, glorying in our altruism, is the glorying of a fool. It belongs on the fool's resume.

Now, Paul is playing with us. He is, *according to his own admission*, winning us with guile. He wants us to think. When we return to this passage in the next study he is going to deliver the *coupe de gratis*. He is going to put the fool's boasting to bed for the last time.

For this study we content ourselves with only a shred of the clue, a hint of light which will expand into a full rainbow in our next study:

30 *If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.*

If I *must* glory I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities, or my feebleness. I will glory in my feebleness.

- While the fool brags of his credentials and his birthrights...
- While the fool brags of his labors and his strengths...
- While the fool brags of his endurance...
- While the fool brags of his sympathy for the weak
- While the fool brags of his service....

I will boast in my weakness, my feebleness, and my infirmity. I will not get my identity from who I am, from what I stand for, for what I have done, for what I have suffered, or even from those whom I have helped. I will glory in my infirmity.

This seems to be a strange virtue, a strange quality for a resume. When Paul is speaking about his weakness here he is not speaking of his fleshliness. He is not speaking of his sinfulness. He is speaking of his utter inability in himself to do anything for God. He is admitting in himself one of the hardest things there is for a man to admit. In ourselves there is nothing good enough to prompt the praises of God. There is nothing in us which impresses Him. It is not that God does not love us when we grow and when we try to achieve. It is rather, that he wants us to realize that He sees things so differently than we. In God's eyes, *we conquer when we surrender. We work when we rest. We are strongest when we are the weakest.* In the words of the songwriter:

The path that I have trod has brought me nearer God,  
Though oft it led through sorrow's gates.  
Though not the way I'd choose, in my way I might lose  
The joy that yet awaits me there.

Not what I wish to do, nor where I wish to go  
For who am I that I should choose my way?  
The Lord shall choose for me - 'tis better far I know  
Then let Him bid me go - or stay.

Submission to the will of Him who guides me still  
I surety of His love revealed;  
My soul shall rise above This world in which I move;  
I conquer only where I yield.

I conquer only where I yield... will we ever grasp what this means?

Am I trying to establish my credibility and worth based on my achievements for Christ? Am I establishing my identity based on my sacrificial servanthood, suffering, or obedience to Christ? If those are the wells from which I draw my identity, I too, am a fool.

Herein lays the paradox: The very things which we see as gifts from God, strengths, and virtues, abilities, vision, and even passion for Christ, can be the very obstacles which keep us from a full and rich ministry for Christ. Spiritual strength comes from weakness.

Nowhere is this truer than when it comes to the matter of our salvation. Jesus Christ has yet to save anyone who deserves salvation. He has never allowed anyone into His heaven, based on his sacrificial living and his kindness to others. The Bible tells us that the things we bring to God in an effort to convince Him of our worthiness for heaven areas filthy, offensive rags in His eyes.

Isaiah says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6) *All we like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him (that is, Jesus Christ) the iniquity of us all. We are all mendicants and beggars in God's eyes, and that is the beauty of it. We have a Savior who saves only mendicants and beggars.*

J. Wilbur Chapman often told of the testimony given by a certain man in one of his meetings: "I got off at the Pennsylvania depot as a tramp, and for a year I begged on the streets for a living. One day I touched a man on the shoulder and said, *"Hey, mister, can you give me a dime?"* As soon as I saw his face I was shocked to see that it was my own father. I said, *"Father, Father, do you know me?"* Throwing his arms around me and with tears in his eyes, he said, *"Oh my son, at last I've found you! I've found you. You want a dime? Everything I have is yours."* Think of it. I was a tramp. I stood begging my own father for ten cents, when for 18 years he had been looking for me to give me all that he had."

And so, it is with this Heavenly Father of ours. Once we come to our senses, like the Prodigal of old, and see our sinfulness and our poverty, then, and only then, can He save us.

## What Goes Up Must Come Down

**Intro:** While sitting in the dentist's office I observed a grouping of aquariums which were interconnected with plastic tubes so that the fish could move freely from one tank to another. What amazed me was the fact that some of the fish seemed to find the escape tubes totally by accident as they kept swimming up to the edges of the tank. Other fish seemed to have memorized the locations of the tubes, knew exactly where they could and could not swim, and did not bother too much looking elsewhere.

We too, are in a fish tank. We are in a closed system called the universe. There seem to be limits which God has placed around us for our own good and for His eternal purpose. We must rely on the scriptures for any information which is available about the world beyond us. Some of us are content with those limits. Some of us are continually pushing our noses against the glass.

In the passage in which we have before us here in 2 Corinthians 12 we have a rare exception to the closed system rule. We have a fish which has been taken out of the tank for a few minutes and then returned to the water. As he returns to our fish bowl we are very interested in the lessons which we can learn from him.

The subject is introduced in verse 1.

1 ¶ *It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.*

We are in the middle of Paul's famous *Fool's Address* which is devoted to the whole issue of boasting. Effectively, Paul has shown us the things he *could* boast about if he so chose. He could boast about his credentials, his Jewishness. He could boast about the great trials which had come upon him.

And, now, if he so chose, he could boast about something so out-of-the ordinary, so unusual, so esoteric that, if the true facts were revealed, no false apostle could approximate it. He could talk about *visionary experiences* in verse 1-10.

The fact that Paul was even willing to bring this subject up and use it in his argument shows us how seriously he took the charges of the false apostles and *how much* was at stake. But we believe that there is much more that Paul wants us *all* to understand about this matter of boasting and glorying. He is answering the false apostles on the one hand, but he is teaching us an important lesson on the other hand. Specifically, Paul is teaching us that our strength is in our weakness.

In that context our chapter which is titled, What Goes Up Must Come Down, is divided into two parts. The first part is labeled: Going Up. The second part is, Coming Down. Let's talk about going up. Let's meet the fish who took the trip outside the aquarium and returned for the benefit of us all.

## I. Going Up

*2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.*

Who was the fish? We cannot say for sure, but the great majority of Bible commentators believe that the man was Paul himself and that he is speaking in the *third* person, a legitimate literary tool. We suspect it was Paul himself because of his intimate knowledge of the situation. We suspect it was Paul because he did not deny it. We believe the reason why he did not speak in the first person was that he wanted his readers to focus on the issue, not on him.

Now, I want to offer a few lines to deal with a more advanced issue. We as Dispensationalists are generally characterized as *cessationists*. That is, we are construed as those who believe that any evidence of visions, revelations, signs, and wonders have ceased. Now, even *if* we believe that tongues have *ceased*, in the context of 1 Corinthians 13, I think we need to be very careful not to accept the title of *cessationists* without some clarification. The title implies that God *never will*, in the future, use signs. Our argument, to the contrary goes like this.

1. In the future, God *will* again use *signs and dreams and visions* as an indication that the great and terrible day of the Lord has come.

2. Prior to that, especially just before and early on in Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week, there will be *false* manifestations which will be used to deceive even the very elect, if that were possible. The great majority of *extra biblical manifestations* which we are encountering today are *ecumenical* in nature and are *false*. Furthermore, the *visions and revelations which are being touted today are adding to and taking away from* the Word of God. God is not a liar.

We mention these things to underscore the fact we are not even addressing the issue of visions and revelations in these notes. Clearly, in my mind, the visions and revelations which Paul is talking about specifically in verse 1 of our passage are the visions and revelations which would *identify* him as an *apostle*. They are the signs and wonders of an apostle alluded to in verse 12. If you are a signs and wonders person and are convinced that God is revealing Himself through such visions as Paul records here, I invite you to contact me for further discussion of this important issue. It is most likely that you have been seduced by false teachers.

We leave many questions unanswered here. Do we hold that *any* vision is, necessarily, a revelation of the Word of God, and therefore constitutes an addition to the Bible? Does that not mean that someone, in his prayer closet, on his bed, or elsewhere cannot have an experience with God which is so personal, so sacred that it changes the life forever? I believe the answer to that question is yes. I believe that 1.) scripture does not deny this possibility anywhere, and that, 2.) the experiences of Godly men and women have related such interludes of intimacy. I am speaking of men and women who were not otherwise caught up in the ecumenical spirit of the age, men and women who were in every way people of the Word of God. One *can* have a deep spiritual experience with God. God is sovereign and can do as He jolly well pleases. We are in the aquarium, He is *not in it*. He is not in a box.

In the next two statements I offer my *personal opinion*, and do not claim to have any *inspiration* from God!

1. We are never commanded to seek an ecstatic or mystical experience. It goes contrary to the principles of the daily walk in grace that we would even *need* such an experience. There is also great danger in doing so because we lay ourselves open to demonic influences when we do so. For those who reject this point, I record the testimony of godly folks (not the dog and pony show folks) who do claim to have had a special experience with the Lord:

2. We never return from such an experience without a bad case of sun burn. What comes up will come down. It is no light thing to experience the presence of the living God. You *will* be injured in the process as surely as was Jacob.

Let's get back to substantive facts and notice the facts which *are* clear:

**1. The man was *in Christ*.** That is, he had become a part of the body of Christ through faith in the finished work of Christ. The term "Christian" is an invention of unbelievers. It is *their* description. The problem with the term Christian is that, in our culture it includes many folks who are not *in Christ*. They do not know Christ as Savior. They have not had their sins washed away in the blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. This man was *in Christ*. This is not like the Pensacola bunch who have saved *and* unsaved alike floating away in their imaginary river of God.

**2. This incident was an *old incident*.** Had not the occasion necessitated its recollection we would *never* have heard of it. It is the *only* incident of its kind ever recorded anywhere in the Bible. It was *unique*. There is no Amtrak between here and the celestial paradise.

It took 14 years for the discussion of this incident to even surface. If you happen to believe this man was Paul, and I have become convinced that it was, and you count back 14 years or so, you *could* very likely associate this incident with Paul's stoning at Lystra, a time when Paul needed some very special encouragement from Christ, a time when Paul was left for *dead* and then revived. The point is that it was an *old incident*.

My argument is, that when any true event where the presence of God is made known in the life in an unusual way occurs, you will discover that the person involved will *not* likely care to discuss it. If you are specially blessed, you *may* get a discussion from them on their deathbed. A believer who has had such an experience with God will not risk allowing that discussion to become profaned or commonplace.

**3. The experience was *biblical*.** The man was caught up to the third heaven, which he also calls paradise. The atmosphere which surrounds us is commonly understood to be the first heaven. Outer space, the place of the stars and planets, is commonly understood to be the second heaven. The third heaven is where those who go to be with Christ are even now. It is paradise and is probably very *garden-like*. There is a strong likelihood that the actual throne of God exists above the third heaven due to the use of some of the Greek prepositions used in this regard.

**4. Paul could not distinguish whether the man was transported in a vision or in the flesh.** Can a corruptible body be allowed inside God's heaven, or were Enoch and Elisha given special temporary bodies? If so, where are their earthly bodies? Who knows? It is irrelevant to the point. Paul did not see the idea of an earthly body being taken to Paradise as impossibility, as the Gnostics would have. But this does lead to the next important fact:

## 5. The actual things which the man heard and saw were *not* to be discussed.

4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

*Unspeakable* could mean *unutterable*, but *unlawful* means exactly that. This *is*, of course, a great disappointment to us. We would all like to know what heaven is like. We would all like to know what those things were which were heard, but that *barrier* is not to be broken except for those having one way tickets.

One of the advantages of having traveled a few miles down the road of life is the privilege of collecting all of the crazy charismatic stories about trips to heaven. Jimmy Swaggart has his collection and just about every other charismatic of any consequence has his or hers. The problem is not only that their experiences contradict each others', but the real truth is that, in my understanding of verse 4, it *is unlawful to speak of such things anyway*, if a man *did* get to paradise. And while I wouldn't want to hurt Jimmy, I don't think he was a likely candidate for the trip. But the gullible will go on being dazzled and amazed, deceiving even their own selves.

For the sake of argument, let's say that one *does* have some kind of special experience with the living God. He may not necessarily be transported to heaven, but, nonetheless, he has some kind of spiritually uplifting experience. This is something so dramatic, so unique, and so biblical that this experience could only be the result of the moving of the Spirit of God. What are we, or rather, what should he, make of this very precious experience? Let's move to the second point to find out. We saw What Goes Up. Now, let's look at:

## II. Coming Down

### A. Here is the *Principle*:

5 *Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.*

This is the principle which God wants us to grasp.

Let's say something glorious of this nature should happen to someone else we know. If it is truly of the Lord and we truly love our brother it would only be natural that we would use this occasion to glorify God and rejoice in His goodness. We are not, however to react the same way if it happens to us, personally

### 1. We are not to glory in spiritually esoteric experiences.

One Saturday morning my wife and I sneaked out for breakfast at a popular little restaurant in our town. I happened to be alone on a bench outside the restaurant. But I was really alone for a woman on the next bench was telling the whole world about the day when she got her "baptism." She explained to all, in well rehearsed words loud enough for everyone to hear how she waited 17 years for it and how when day came God told her just exactly what to do. She was to go to the service and to be silent. Then she was told to wait for just the exact moment when she moved down the aisle. Then she was to speak to a man about his soul, and then, BAM, she was baptized, just like that! It was so thrilling I could hardly contain myself.



It is not my intention to ridicule her experience. It is my purpose to make a point. If there was something akin to the baptism of the Spirit, what kind of fruit would God desire that it produced in our lives?

It would produce humility, not pride. Paul said in verse 6 “...lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.” Interestingly, Paul feared that such an experience would cause men to evaluate him on that basis of the experience and not on the basis of what they saw and heard in him. The woman whose testimony I endured wanted to be *known* for being rewarded for her long search.

Furthermore, such a baptism would produce such a terrible awareness of our sinfulness, and give us such a dose of God’s holiness that we would be almost afraid to speak of it. True experiences with God always do that. The greatest evidence of a man’s holiness is his awareness of his sinfulness.

Instead of giving way to pride and glorying in the experience:

## **2. Our focus should be on our infirmities.**

Do you see how terribly far we have come from new age thinking? The new ager says, look inward, look to yourself for that strength which is in all of us. You can do it. You just have to bring it out of yourself. The Christian also takes an inward look, but he takes it for another purpose. He takes it to remind himself of his weakness, his infirmities. He reminds himself of the pit from which he is hewn. That is the *principle*. Now,

### **B. Here is the *Problem*.**

It’s not that easy. The more intimately God deals with us, the more powerful our ministries are for Christ and the more far reaching our influence is, the more dangerous it gets! The more likely it is that we’ll confuse God’s power for our power!

So, this is what God graciously did for Paul, and it is what God often does for us. Listen to Paul’s testimony:

*7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*

### **C. Here is the *Plan***

God adjusts our life experience for us through allowing Satan to buffet us. This is a whole study in itself. It seems as though a thousand questions rise up out of this passage. Just keep the basic facts squarely in mind. When struggles with our own infirmities come, notice how Paul handled his.

**In verse 7 he put the blame on Satan.** We're in the fish tank. For reasons *beyond* our knowledge, God allows Satan to buffet us when it is for our benefit. (Read 1Corinthians 5:5) God uses Satan to his own advantage. But, put the blame on Satan.

**In verse 8 he put the problem on God.**

*8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*

Pray about your weakness and your infirmities. Do not be glib about your weaknesses or satisfied with them! Do not presume upon God!

**In verse 9 he put the focus of maturity.**

*9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

So, *you* thought when you received Christ that all your problems would end. Little did you know what kind of plans God had for you! Little did you know that He planned to carve away at you, chopping off pieces here and there, in order to conform you to the image of His Son!

Little did you know that there would be times of frustration, not at God, but at yourself and your own weaknesses. And, worse, you did not know that some of them would never go away. Not a very good picture of a victorious Christian life, is it? Or *is* it? Verse 10 sums it up:

*10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

...when I am weak - then am I strong.

No fame needed here! Hollywood knows what fame does to you. No riches needed here! Wall Street knows that riches do to you. And no quick trips to heaven for a supercharge are needed here! Even Paul knows the kind of danger that puts you in.

*Instead of quick trips and shortcuts, why not just follow the plan and path which God has for you this week? Remember your infirmities. For when we are weak, we are strong. No need to be a comet, just be a star, shining in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation. Settle for being another sinner, saved by grace, a sinner through which God is working by His grace. And His grace is sufficient for you.*

## Proven Apostle, Proven Parent

Intro: In the course of one's training for leadership in a Bible school or seminary the student is usually exposed to what we call leadership models. Such textbook treatments and classroom discussions generally left me very cold. I found that, in most cases, it was more in the author's intent to reject authoritarian leadership than it was to discover a true biblical model for leadership.

For example, we were warned especially about different kinds of pastoral styles. One was called the *benevolent dictator*. That style was soundly (and rightfully) refuted. Another favorite target was what texts called the *paternal leader*. This is the sort of *godfather* type leader. He takes good care of you and demands your loyalty in return. In preference to these styles we were encouraged to strike new leadership postures. The *coach*, or better yet, the *player coach* was touted as the ideal goal for which to strive.

Frankly, I was never impressed by any of the recommended models because I could never find the *biblical justification* for them. I held the notion that *biblical* hermeneutic, homiletic, and even leadership styles could all be abstracted from the scriptures if we only took the time to find them. I also believed, and still do, that we must look first to Christ, and then to the apostles for our examples in all three of these areas, hermeneutics, homiletics, and leadership styles.

Since those days, my quest for leadership models for the spiritual leader has led me to two strong examples which seem to me to rise above all other models (and there *are* other models.) One is the shepherd-sheep model. After all, even the word *pastor* means shepherd. The biblical elder role, for example, is strongly permeated with shepherding imagery.

The other leadership model is more controversial, even though it is just another expression of shepherding. It is what I call the parent-child, or father-son model. A careful study of Paul and his writings will quickly reveal that Paul, by example, struck this posture more than any other posture. We are not speaking of the kind of spirit which Rome advances. Jesus rebuked this with great clarity:

*8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.*

*9 And call no **man** your **father** upon the earth: for one is your **Father**, which is in heaven.*

*10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.*

There is no biblical office, title, or position of *father*. But spiritual leaders should, none the less, assume the role of parents and leverage the father-son teaching technique just as did Paul. Take, for example the passage which we now study, 2 Corinthians 12.

**In verses 11 and 12 Paul ends his “*Fools address*” and leaves us with his final claim to true *biblical* apostleship. He leaves no question in our minds when he says:**

*11 I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.*

*12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*

End of discussion. Paul has been forced to *defend* himself when these believers should have been defending him. He has had to *commend* himself when they should have been commending him. He has been forced to *compare* himself with the *superlative* apostles (called chiefest in your text) when they should have long since seen these false apostles as impostors.

He has argued his point and, in addition, *He has lived the life of a true apostle in front of them.* They have seen the *signs* and *wonders* and *mighty deeds* which were peculiar to the apostles.

We might say that Paul has finished defending his office, his *apostolic office*, but he has not yet finished defending his *leadership style*. He has one punch left for those who have effectively been saying “*Your leadership style does not commend the apostolic office you claim to have.*”

For our benefit he now strikes the role of the *parent* defending himself to his own child. Let’s notice the four key traits which make for godly parenting and good leadership. First notice:

## **I. A Godly Parent or Leader is Committed to Sacrifice**

### **A. His sacrifice will probably be misunderstood.**

Look at verse 13 -

*13 For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.*

While we must continue to verse 14 before we can absolutely *prove* that Paul is assuming the parental mode, everyone of us who have been either children or parents know what verse 13 is about. The verse is about *peer pressure*. It is probably a kind of reverse peer pressure. In modern terms we might say it this way. Because of their maturity levels, Paul was still treating this church like a mission church which had not yet gained full stature. They were not supporting their own leaders yet. They were still receiving the gratis support of Paul.

Whatever the case, they were not *like* the other churches they knew of. And *that* is what was bugging them. Or perhaps, even more specifically *Paul* was not giving them full status. Paul has, thus, become a great embarrassment to them in the context of their peers.

Teenagers believe in democracy. They believe in freedom and justice for all. One 16 year old may be ready for certain privileges which another 17 year old in the same home may not be prepared. Wise parents *know this* and they do not buckle to it. Wise parents know that children are all equal but children are not all the same.

Now, the irony is in front of us. Here Paul is sacrificing, and living without the benefit of their support at Corinth, specifically because they are still *children*. Paul says in verse 14:

*14 Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.*

Let me ask you a question concerning the modern world. When do we really know that a child has matured to become an adult? We know it when he begins assuming responsibility for others instead of expecting others to assume responsibility for him.

Is Paul being mean by not giving this mission church equal status with the indigenous churches around them who support their leaders? The answer is no. Paul knows that their attitudes on giving have not *matured*. He knows that if he accepts support from them any one of a number of things could still happen. False accusations could be made about his motives would likely be made. A new sense of independence would come upon the congregation and they would feel they could resist Paul's leadership, or perhaps even begin instructing Paul about how he should go about his business. We do not know. We do know they simply weren't mature enough to take on Paul's support without it doing damage to Paul, the testimony of Christ, and the Corinthian church.

A sacrificial parent or leader knows his sacrifice will be misunderstood. Even worse, look at verse 15:

*15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.*

## **B. He knows sacrifice will probably be unappreciated**

Here is irony. The more a parent sacrifices for the child, the less a child appreciates it. Very often, the more a leader sacrifices for the congregation the less the congregation appreciates it. In fact, the more they demand. Your services will never be enough. Time invested will never be enough. Visits to the sick will never be enough. Your efforts at planning and leading will never be enough.

Now, the point is this: That is not something about which a leader complains. If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. We cannot expect the spiritually immature to act any other way. We cannot expect our children to be crying babies one day and full grown adults another day. Teaching them to grapple with their selfishness is part of the parenting process.

When you visit the hospital and you see some new mommy being wheeled out to the car with her little bundle you can't help but wonder, has she ever dreamed about the sacrifice which lies ahead? It will be years before the child is mature enough to look back and appreciate that sacrifice.

Expect it, prospective leader! Expect it prospective parent, because that's the way it always will be. Godly parents and godly leaders can expect to sacrifice for the young. Notice secondly,

## **II. A Godly Parent or Leader is Consistent in His Own Example.**

In the example before us we have a parent who has been falsely accused by his child, possibly of being manipulative or deceptive. We see this in verses 17 and 18:

17 *Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?*

18 *I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?*

It appears, and we cannot say for sure because we can only surmise by what we have in Corinthians, but it appears that Paul's opponents are suggesting that while Paul is not accepting and funds directly from Corinth, somehow he has managed to funnel funding through Titus or others whom he had sent to Corinth. In other words, he has been accused of guile. That is probably why we read those words just *before* this in verse 16:

16 *But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.*

I practiced guile all-right, I obligated you, not for money, but I obligated you to my love. If that is guile, it is godly guile.

You know, Mom and Dad, you will never survive parenthood without having your motives challenged a few times. And how you respond when you *are* righteous and you are accused of being *unrighteous* will tell your children a lot about you. Christian leader, you too will not survive without having your motives challenged.

How did Paul respond?

**1. He *does answer the charge.*** In verse 17 Paul says effectively, *My record stands.* You all know better.

**2. He defends his consistency as best as he can.**

18 *I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?*

I was *consistent*. I was predictable. I was open. Titus and the others and I *all* behaved the same way.

Now, we all have our failures, parents and children and pastors and congregations. Some of the perceptions and misunderstandings we have may never be cleared up or it may take years and years before all the facts are really seen by everyone. And I do not have a lot of answers for a lot of the problems we get ourselves into, but I have learned that the best protection which we have against problems, is *consistency*. When parents try to be *consistent* in their behavior, and when *pastors* try to be *consistent* in applying leadership most children and most congregations are very forgiving.

Paul says to these Corinthians, not only have I been righteous, I have been consistent.

### III. A Godly Parent or Leader Confirms His Motives.

19 *Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.*

Paul has made himself accountable to these Corinthians , not because he needs to defend himself. The truth is, he really didn't need them. They really couldn't hurt him. He has expended all the energy of producing this letter. He has refuted all the false accusations. He has challenged all the aberrant behavior, because of one pure motive. He did it for their edification. He truly saw them as Christ's sheep and as precious to Christ. He valued them in spite of the way they had devalued him. He loved them.

If you don't love wandering sheep please don't be a shepherd. If you don't love children please don't be a teacher, and certainly, don't be a parent.

But isn't it funny that statistics show us that the thing children remember the least in their growing up years are those times when their parents actually said with their own lips and their own mouths, "I love you" This is why godly parents and pastors will affirm their love in large doses on multiple occasions. Good parents and good leaders let others know that they really do want to see them grow. That really *is* why they are there.

#### **IV. A Godly Parent or Leader is Confrontational.**

##### **A. He lets his children know what he expects.**

*20 For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:*

I am thankful to God that I had parents who told me what they feared so that I too would be on guard. I had pastors and youth pastors who warned me about the pitfalls. I knew what was expected. I knew what was not acceptable.

I find it interesting that, in this list of debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, swellings, backbitings, whisperings, swellings and tumults - do you know what I see most? I see *childishness*. You see, it is as children that we first learn to express these traits, arguing, fighting, envying, anger strife, backbitings, and whisperings. And, when we are not matured these childish traits become adult problems.

We truly have a society full of these traits today and they are the result of homes which are breaking down, parents who have gone AWOL. A godly parent and a godly leader doesn't beat around the bush. Finally,

##### **B. He let's his children know that his success is linked with their success.**

*21 And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.*

Young people, are you aware that when you fall into sin you not only humble the one you are with, but you humble yourself. And, you not only humble yourself, you humble your parents. And you not only humble your parents, you humble your pastor and your spiritual leaders. You see, we are all in this together, all of us. And worst of all, we are humbled before our God.

Uncleanness, lasciviousness, fornication, and a host of other sins into which children who are not yet adults fall, and adults who are still children fall, hurt us all. They hurt us terribly. Our success is linked to your success and our failure is linked to your failure! We're counting on you to bear the family name. We're counting on you to bear the church name for you are part of our church family. And most of all, we're counting on you to bear the precious name of Christ!

Godly leaders and godly parents are:

Committed in their Sacrifice  
Consistent in their Example  
Confirming in their Motives, and  
Confrontational in their Discipline

And why do spiritual leaders do this? Because they love you. And it should come as no surprise that the Lord Jesus does exactly the same thing on our behalf. While we were yet sinners and while we were still His enemies, while we were still hurling our fists at Him, He was giving Himself for us. No wonder we always say one cannot understand true parenting who does not truly know God as His Father!



## The Final Word

*Intro:* There is something very sobering which catches us as we come to the conclusion of these two Corinthian letters: There are the expected reminders of the love of God and admonitions to love the brethren which we find at the conclusion of any of Paul's letters. But there is also an undeniably firm and sad tone to the chapter. We have a parent who is leaving these Corinthians with a *disciplinary* tone. Sometimes, you know, there is just too much at stake to end every conversation with hugs and kisses. Sometimes we need to be left to meditate on the seriousness of our condition.

And we must confess, that just as we sometimes benefited by watching a brother or sister being disciplined we too can benefit from the discipline of our Corinthian brothers. In so doing, spare ourselves from their discomfort.

As we look at the thirteenth chapter we will call verses 1-2 A Final Visit, verse 3 and 4 A Final Defense, verse 5-9 a Final Exam, verse 10 A Final Warning, and verses 11-14 a Final Benediction.

### I. A Final Visit

1 ¶ *This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.*

2 *I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:*

#### A. There *will* be a visit.

When Paul says that he is *ready* to come the third time it leaves us with a historical question. Did Paul come twice before, or will this be his third *attempt* at visiting for the second time, something which he promises us he *will* do, even though he failed on his second attempt? My personal opinion is that the second case is the correct case. That is, Paul had *resolved* to go previously, and had had a change in plans which his enemies used to their advantage. They said in 1 Corinthians 4:18: *Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.* . Paul is going to make good on his word. Secondly,

#### B. The visit *will* be for the purpose of spiritual inquisition.

*In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.*

Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 19:15. There is going to be a reckoning. It will not be a witch hunt. It will be fair and legal, but there is going to be a separation of the sheep and the goats. The false apostles, the false brethren and the disobedient brethren *will* be exposed.

Paul will not arrive at Corinth and piously announce “*Let he who is without sin cast the first stone!*” Rather, he comes bearing the sword, the sword of the Word of God. He is going to *reprove and rebuke with all longsuffering and doctrine*. Those who sin will be *rebuked before all*. Thirdly, he reminds his readers:

### **C. There is time to repent now; there will be not time to repent then.**

*2 I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:*

Well, they wanted a real apostle with real teeth. Now, they are going to get one. There is going to be a final visit. When I think of Paul’s return I cannot help but reminded that our Savior is also coming. This One who has delayed His coming *will* return. For those who are *in Christ*, for those who are obedient to Christ it will be the most joyful day of our existence. For those who have rebelled, He will not spare. This is the time to set things straight. This is the day of salvation. This is the day of repentance.

## **II. A Final Defense**

*3 Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.*

*4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.*

As many times as I have read these verses I have never gotten over their cutting edge. They pierce, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joint and marrow. It is the coupe de grace, the master stroke of the entire letter and Paul’s entire defense. Effectively, Paul is saying this:

1. Your image of Christ is *strong*.
2. Therefore, you assume His servant should appear strong.
3. You have forgotten that Christ Himself was strongest when he was weakest, and,
4. Our power, as believers, is also in *our* weakness.

A true servant participates in Christ’s servanthood and in Christ’s humility. This is the ultimate paradox, the ultimate irony. This is not only the way we live the Christian life this is the way we enter at salvation’s door, recognizing our *weakness*, not our strength. We must recognize our inability to save ourselves or to justify ourselves in any way before the living God. Not by works (Ephesians 2:8-10), but simply clinging to the cross of Christ.

This is Paul’s final defense. It is his final answer to all of those whose apostolic expectations he had dashed by living the life of a servant instead of assuming the garb and posture of a cleric. His strength is in his weakness - just as Christ Himself modeled for us at the Cross.

You do understand, don’t you, that it was this apparent *weakness* of Christ which precipitated his great rejection by the Jews? Had He come as a warring Messiah they would have rallied behind Him in a day. Instead, His cross has become the offense, the scandal, the curse and the stumblingblock of the Jewish people. And it is the offense of that cross which turns men away from Him at this very hour.

And now, we turn the tables. We have seen - a Final Visit and a Final Defense. Look now at verses 5-9 and what I like to call:

### III. A Final Exam.

Now, it is the Corinthians turn to sit under the light at the examining table:

5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

Can we put some words in Paul's mouth? The idea is what we call *reflexive*; the *emphasis* is on the word yourselves. In effect, Paul is saying *you have had your opportunity to examine me and now it is time to look within your own assembly and look within your own hearts and examine yourselves*. There are three vital thoughts here:

#### A. Notice *what they are to do*.

Specifically, they are commanded to *prove* themselves. We have encountered this important Greek word before, *dokimazo*. It carries with it the word picture of *testing*, specifically testing metal coinage to judge the validity of its contents to see if it is the real thing, the genuine coin of the realm.

#### B. Notice *what they are to determine*.

We are to determine whether we are *in the faith*. We are to test ourselves to see if Christ is *in us*. This is no small matter. For example, this blows one whole mythological ship right out of the water. There are those who tell us that we cannot be sure if we are in the faith. We cannot be sure if Christ is in us. How foolish! Why then would we be commanded to examine ourselves? The Bible tells us the opposite. The Bible tells us we can *know* and we can be *sure* that we are in the faith.

*1 John 3:14 ¶ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*

*1 John 3:19-21 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.  
20 ¶ For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.  
21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.*

*1 John 4:13-15 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.  
14 ¶ And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.  
15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.*

*1 John 5:11-13 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.  
12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.  
13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*

So, you see, we have blown that little mythological ship right out of the water. You can know you are in Christ and that He is in you. You will never know this based upon your feelings. Your

feelings will vary. But you can know because the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to the truths of God's Word and show you God's Son, Jesus Christ. Examine yourselves.

### C. Notice *what they are to fear*.

Paul says:

Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

I told you that the Greek word for *prove* means to *test for the sake of approval*. It is the word *dokimazo*. When Paul says, *except ye be reprobates*, he is using the *same* Greek word, only he has placed a prefix in front of it (the letter a) to reverse its meaning. In other words, Paul is saying, examine yourselves; prove yourselves regarding your salvation so that you will not be found to have failed the test.

This is one exam we cannot afford to fail. We have many folks who believe *in* Christ who are not *in Christ*. Even though they go to church and they go through all the rituals they are not *in the faith*. Even though they say "Lord, Lord" and even though they teach and speak in His name, they are not in the faith. Christ is not in them.

One may ask, how do I know that I am *in* Christ? How do I know He is *in* me? Have you placed your whole hope upon Him for your eternal life for the forgiveness of your sins? Are you depending on your good works, your righteousness, to save you, or are you depending on His? Paul spoke about the Jews of his day noting:

*Ro 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

You see, there *is* a righteousness of God which is *by faith*, Philippians 3:9 and we receive it when we are placed in Christ. You may have it today.

Now, Paul reminds the Corinthians in verse six that he hopes *they* will see that he has not failed the test that he truly is in Christ.

In verse 7 he restates that his intentions toward *them* have been honest. This has been his desire from the first, to see *them* approved in Christ.

In verse 8 he reminds us that we cannot stop the progress of the truth. For all the battles which have gone on, and we have certainly witnessed our share in Corinth, we may be assured that, in the end truth *will win*. It is inevitable:

*8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.*

This verse provides a great relief to me as a pastor and teacher because I have spent my whole life in defense of the truth. I am not speaking of the truth which was handed down to me by some church council, but the truth which I learned in this Book. And frankly, everywhere I look it appears that truth is losing out, just as the old songwriter wrote: truth is forever on the scaffold; wrong is forever on the throne.

A while back I heard a scientist talking about cloning heads onto bodies. He said, and I quote: “We expected the conservative Christians to oppose this, because they have always been against scientific advances.” And I might add he repeated the same statement several times. That’s a lie and he knows it. He knows that God’s people have been at the forefront of scientific advances and that we too, have paid the price for the scientific blindness of others. But I was not surprised by the lie, for the enemies of truth are all around us and he is just one more who needs the light of Christ to open His prejudiced eyes.

But I do not worry, for truth *will* win. In the final analysis we do not know *who* won at Corinth. Do you know that? We do not know who won the battle. We have two reports from history. Clement of Rome reports that 35 years later, the Corinthians were “*somewhat inclined to turbulence, disquieted, and skeptical.*” On the other hand, in 135 Hegesippus speaks “*very favorably of them, especially of their obedience and liberality.*”

Ultimately, we know that true witness of Jesus Christ was lost in Corinth. We may be tempted, thinking of all that, to wonder if Paul wasted his energies. But he did not. For you see, *we can do nothing against the truth.* It will win out. God’s plan *will* come to fruition. In verse 10 - Paul issues:

#### IV. A Final Warning

*10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.*

Paul returned to Corinth with the authority Christ had given Him to carry out His work. As we have already noted, the early day scoffers at Corinth and the last day scoffers of our time will have their day, but just as Paul promised his return to Corinth we have a Savior who promises His return. And when He comes the second time, He comes to rule and to reign. He comes to set the record straight. He comes to make all things right. And He *is* coming.

And what should we do in the interim? We should heed the words of verse 11:

#### V. A Final Benediction

*11 ¶ Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*

*12 Greet one another with an holy kiss.*

*13 All the saints salute you.*

*14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*

- *Be perfect*, or mature.
- *Be of good comfort*, after all, you *are* in Christ.
- *Be of one mind* because the evil one will fight to his dying breath to divide you.
- *Live in peace.*

And the God of peace shall be with you. First, there is the kind of peace which comes first from being *at peace* with God according to Romans 5:1. You can end your foolish war with God by

receiving Christ as your Savior. Secondly there is the kind of peace which comes from *walking with God* and walking *in unity* with His people.

And truly, my prayer for you is Paul's prayer for his brethren at Corinth:

*14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen*

Just as surely as this book has come to an end, so the books of our lives will conclude, some with fewer pages than others. For everything, there is a season. As this is our hour to throw ourselves in the New Covenant ministry with all our strength, we are reminded that these three things, in themselves, are sufficient to carry the day. May the grace of Christ, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit go with you.

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